

WELCOME HOME: TRANSITIONING SOUTHERN BAPTIST  
MILITARY CHAPLAINS BACK INTO THE LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY

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Dedicated to my wife, Sunny, the “sunshine” of my life and a true Proverbs 31 woman,  
for your decades of loving support and personal sacrifice to the ministry.

To my precious daughters, Brooke and Laura,  
whose graceful beauty and godly character adorn their households.

And to my fellow Southern Baptist Military Chaplains  
who have faithfully pastored in the United States Armed Forces  
since 1941.

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## ABSTRACT

### Welcome Home: Transitioning Southern Baptist Military Chaplains

### Back Into The Local Church Ministry

Southern Baptist military chaplains face significant challenges when re-entering the civilian ministry after separating from military service. Most expect to transition back into local church ministry. Others, having experienced rejection or roadblocks, decide out of frustration to leave the ministry. Some military chaplains simply fail to find supportive churches to assist their re-entry process.

This project will, first, address the challenges military chaplains face during their post-military transition. Second, it will identify sources that facilitate their successful ministry transition back into civilian ministry. Third, the project will suggest ways churches can assist military chaplains to make successful re-entry transitions.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### Introduction

*War is ugly, but it's not the worst part of military service. I like to explain war as the “easy” part. The “hard” part is getting out. Transition is by far the biggest battle. In war your only worry is death, you don't have to worry about bills and food and all the other small things we worry about back home. I struggled with transition like anyone else. After many years, I have finally learned to know my place.<sup>1</sup>*

On a hot summer day in 2011 I stood at attention in my last military formation after having done so regularly for almost five decades. Before the sun set that day, the Army issued me a single-paged official document that summarized on one side of the paper my entire military career for the past thirty-eight years. I was told numerous times that this was the only official record to prove that I was ever a member of the Armed Services, “substantiating the details of [my] military service... and required to establish eligibility for benefits and entitlements, including VA medical benefits and home loans, burial services, educational benefits, employment and retirement benefits, membership in veteran organizations, and corporate discounts.”<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after my military retirement ceremony, I surrendered my Department of Defense security access badge to the Pentagon Access Control Division and was escorted out of the building that had been my second home for the past six years. A few days later my wife and I turned over the keys to our government quarters and ended our tenure as residents of a military community for

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent “Rocco” Vargas, “After the War: A Soldier’s Struggle to Come Home”, *History*, A+E Networks, November 10, 2017, accessed August 10, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/after-the-war-a-soldiers-struggle-to-come-home>.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Schwille, Samantha Cherney, Andrea A. Golay, Agnes Gereben Schaefer, “Service Member Separation: Updating the DD Form 214”, Rand Corporation, 2019, accessed January 14, 2020, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2700/RR2712/RAND\\_RR2712.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2700/RR2712/RAND_RR2712.pdf), 40.

the last time. As we drove away from the Military District of Washington, I felt a sense of relief like most of the previous Pentagon occupants before me because that five-sided office building, affectionately referred to as the “puzzle palace”, was now in my rear-view mirror. I expectantly looked forward to rediscovering my new ministry opportunities waiting for me outside the institutional environment of the United States Armed Services.

### **The Long and Winding Road Home**

Upon returning to civilian life, I naturally planned to resume my vocational calling as a pastor that began in 1981 as an ordained Southern Baptist minister. Like all military chaplains, I was simply coming “home”, having been a pastor on loan from my denomination to the Armed Services until separation from military service. To ensure that I maintained my theological identity throughout my military career, I had diligently adhered to my ecclesiastical endorser’s policy guidance to remain active in a Southern Baptist church, which states, “All endorsed chaplains are expected to maintain membership in a Southern Baptist church and develop an accountability relationship with a Southern Baptist church.”<sup>3</sup> I assumed that my active engagement in a local church for the past four decades of military service would benefit my transition back into civilian ministry. After military retirement, I intended to network with local Southern Baptist pastors and denominational leaders and make them aware of my desire and availability to serve any church looking for a pastor.

The opportunity of returning to the civilian pastorate after the military chaplaincy had always been my primary vocational goal. This expectation quickly became one of the most disappointing periods of personal adjustment in my entire adult life and ministry career. What I didn’t realize was that transitioning back to the local church setting from the military chaplaincy

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<sup>3</sup> North American Mission Board, *The Southern Baptist Endorsement Manual for Chaplains: Policies, Guidelines, and Practices for Chaplains* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2021), [https://www.namb.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SBC\\_Chaplaincy-Endorsement-Manual.pdf](https://www.namb.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SBC_Chaplaincy-Endorsement-Manual.pdf), 19.

would be a very difficult process for me professionally, emotionally, and spiritually. A dear friend had once given me some sage advice shortly before I retired from military service, “Doug, the hardest thing you’re going to experience after leaving the military chaplaincy is to find a church home.” Sadly, his words were prophetic. In fact, the long and frustrating search for a church where I could serve as a pastor was quite disheartening, especially as my wife and I had moved to a new city in a geographical area where we had no social network or close denominational connections.

In retrospect, I was a bit naïve about transitioning back to the civilian ministry, assuming that my Southern Baptist family would enthusiastically welcome me back home into their fellowship with open arms. Perhaps they would express their appreciation that I had “sacrificed” most of my adult life faithfully representing them on the mission field with the United States Army, an organization that had assigned or deployed me to five continents, three combat zones, and twenty-six zip codes during my military ministry. Surely my fellow Southern Baptist pastors would convey that they had interceded for me and my fellow military chaplains, especially during a time of war, and that their congregations had continued to “pray without ceasing”<sup>4</sup> for us after we returned home from completing our military service obligation.

I truly believed that pastors and denominational leaders had the highest regard for military chaplains, perhaps after having read or heard about their faithful and courageous ministry in combat zones and war-torn countries around the world countless times since the terrorist attacks on our Nation in September 11, 2001. Perhaps they were vaguely aware that I was the first Southern Baptist military chaplain in the past fifty-four years nominated by the President of the United States to serve as the United States Army Chief of Chaplains. In fact, the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention had even presented me a certificate of appreciation at my

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:17. All scripture references are taken from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

retirement ceremony, expressing their sincere gratitude for my decades of faithful service as one of their endorsed military chaplains who, according to the citation, exhibited the highest degree of “devotion to duty, effective ministry, denominational loyalty, and missionary endeavor.”<sup>5</sup>

However, none of my previous ministry experiences, professional achievements, or personal sacrifices were beneficial for a smooth transition back into the civilian ministry. In fact, while making my first post-military office call with a local Southern Baptist denominational leader to offer my ministry services *pro bono* to any of his churches without a pastor, I was absolutely shocked by his response to my gracious offer. He informed me that many of his pastors often looked upon military chaplains with a level of disdain, believing that we were simply “re-entering” the ministry and had not “paid our dues” over the years in the trenches of a local church. He went on to say, “To be quite honest with you, many of my pastors simply don’t know what to do with chaplains.” Unfortunately, this type of attitude seems all too prevalent among church pastors.

For example, Southern Baptist spokesman Thom Rainer, the former president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, seemingly warned pastors from the danger of falling into the role of a chaplain while leading their church, writing, “In local church ministry, we don’t typically use the term ‘chaplain,’ though there are many pastoral roles that are congruent with chaplaincy. In fact, most of the pastoral care and concern for church members are chaplain-like functions.”<sup>6</sup> Rainer went on to say that pastors should primarily focus on leading and equipping their congregation for ministry instead of morphing into a primarily pastoral care role like chaplains. Having served as both a local church pastor and a military chaplain, I experienced very little difference in the ministry responsibilities between these two pastoral positions. In fact, I have long promoted the fact

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<sup>5</sup> Chaplaincy Evangelism Team, “Certificate of Retirement”, July 22, 2011, North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA.

<sup>6</sup> Thom S. Rainer, “Ten Signs A Pastor is Becoming a Chaplain”, *Church Answers (Blog)*, September 7, 2015, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/ten-signs-a-pastor-is-becoming-a-chaplain/>.

that military chaplains essentially provide ministry at the “tip of the spear”, going into the closed cultural environment of the military community where churches did not or were not freely allowed to provide religious services or pastoral care needs.

Prior to the end of my office call with the local denominational leader, he apologetically suggested that I might consider interviewing for a ministry position with another denomination! His recommendation offended me, especially since I had been an active member of Southern Baptist churches all my life. He also promised that he would stay in touch with me and refer my name for any ministry opportunities that became available within his association of churches. That was the last time I heard from him.

How often has this scenario played out with Southern Baptist military chaplains who separate or retire from military service and return to the civilian ministry? How difficult is it for them to continue their vocational calling beyond the institutional ministry setting of the Armed Services? How often do former military chaplains, frustrated by their efforts to re-enter the civilian ministry, decide to leave the ministry altogether and pursue another vocational field of interest? How frequently do they struggle, like most veterans, with issues of self-identity and purpose because of leaving the military, one of the most supportive and engaged communities in American society? How many military chaplains, after separating from the Armed Services, grieve alone while reflecting on the end of their years of military ministry?

### **The Context of Military Life**

You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood, back home to romantic love, back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame, ...back home to someone who can help you, save you, ease the burden for you, back home to the old forms and things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time--back home to the escapes of Time and Memory.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again* (New York: Scribner, 1968), accessed April 12, 2020, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks07/0700231h.html#chapter6-44>, 604.

Most new military recruits, whose average age at the time of enlistment is twenty-four years or younger, have a deep longing for home after first entering the Armed Services. “Home” is the only thing certain in their lives as they become completely immersed into the distinctive culture of the Armed Services in a few short weeks. Georgetown University Professor Nancy Sherman describes the transformation from civilian life to military member as a “metamorphosis where the focus of life shifts and a new organizing principle takes hold, a shift in one’s personal habits and focus of activities”<sup>8</sup>, manifesting into such external changes as a new language filled with acronyms, hair and grooming standards of appearance, and assimilation into a community with a shared purpose and common values. In regard to military chaplains, it is most likely the first time they engage with other faith group leaders or have the pastoral responsibility of performing or providing for the religious needs of those outside of their own denominational background.

One of the key aspects of military life, a factor that clouds the way back “home”, is the frequent geographical relocation also known as a permanent change of station (PCS) move. According to a 2017 Defense Manpower Data Center study, “the average number of PCS moves reported by active-duty service members is 2.6, with 31 percent reporting one move and 15 percent reporting six or more moves over a twenty-year military career.”<sup>9</sup>

These moves have the tendency to disrupt family stability in several critical areas, including a working military spouse’s loss of employment, the financial strain incurred from moving costs, the stress of finding a new home, and the constant disruption of pulling their K-12 children from school, often in the middle of an academic year. A 2017 Blue Star Families Military Family

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<sup>8</sup> Nancy Sherman, *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of our Soldiers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Patricia K. Tong, Leslie Adrienne Payne, Craig A. Bond, Sarah O. Meadows, Jennifer Lamping Lewis, Esther M. Friedman, and Ervant J. Maksabedian Hernandez, *Enhancing Family Stability During a Permanent Change of Station A Review of Disruptions and Policies* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2018), 1.

Lifestyle Survey reported that “44 percent of service members and 45 percent of spouses indicate ‘relocation stress’ as one of the top five stressors experienced in their career as a military family.”<sup>10</sup>

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on our nation, the United States has continued to deploy troops into armed conflict in Southwest Asia, the longest war ever fought by the United States military with an all-volunteer force. Today a service member who joined the military in 2001 has deployed into a combat environment at least three times. Additionally, at the time of this writing, the United States currently has almost 200,000 troops “deployed into more than 150 countries around the world.”<sup>11</sup> As a result, military service remains one of the most demanding, challenging, and dangerous professions in the world. However, one of the greatest difficulties our troops face beyond PCS moves, rigorous training, and combat deployments occurs when they eventually transition back to civilian life.

According to a 2011 Pew Research Center survey of 1,853 veterans, at least 27% of them had problems returning home to their families and communities, a number increasing to “44% among veterans who served in the ten years since the 9/11 attacks.”<sup>12</sup> A 2019 survey of 1,284 military veterans revealed that their adjustment back to civilian life had become even more difficult with one in six respondents describing their transition as “very difficult”<sup>13</sup>. Interestingly, the study

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<sup>10</sup> Cristin O. Shiffer, Rosalinda V. Maury, Hisako Sonethavilay, Jennifer L. Hurwitz, H. Christine Lee, Rachel K. Linsner, and Michella S. Mehta, 2017 *Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Comprehensive Report*, Encinitas, Calif., Blue Star Families and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2017, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/MFLS-ComprehensiveReport17-FINAL.pdf>, 14.

<sup>11</sup> US Department of Defense, *Number of Military and DoD Appropriated Fund (APF) Civilian Personnel Permanently Assigned By Duty Location and Service/Component* (Washington, DC: Defense Manpower Data Center, December 31, 2019), <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/about/overview>.

<sup>12</sup> Rich Morin, “The Difficult Transition from Military to Civilian Life”, *Pew Research Center*, December 8, 2011, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/12/08/the-difficult-transition-from-military-to-civilian-life/>.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Parker, Ruth Igienik, Amana Barroso and Anthony Cilluffo, *The American Veterans Experience and the Post-9/11 Generation*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/09/10/the-american-veteran-experience-and-the-post-9-11-generation/>.

also found that post-9/11 veterans had an easier transition to civilian life if they practiced “frequent attendance at religious services.”<sup>14</sup> In 2018, after seeing the alarming rate of suicide among veterans jump almost 50 percent from 2002 to 2017, approximately 22 per day, President Donald J. Trump issued Executive Order 13822, “Supporting Our Veterans During Their Transition From Uniformed Service to Civilian Life”, directing the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Homeland Security, to prioritize their efforts in assisting veterans to transition successfully to civilian life, stating:

After serving our Nation, veterans deserve long, fulfilling civilian lives. Most veterans’ experience in uniform increases their resilience and broadens the skills they bring to the civilian workforce. Unfortunately, in some cases within the first year following transition, some veterans can have difficulties reintegrating into civilian life after their military experiences and some tragically take their own lives. Veterans, in their first year of separation from service, experience suicide rates approximately two times higher than the overall veteran suicide rate.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Heather O’Beirne Kelly, director of military and veterans’ health policy at the American Psychological Association, stressed that an effective transition program for military veterans is essential to ease their adjustment to civilian life and reduce the risk of their becoming a potential suicide victim. She warned, “The suicide rate among veterans during the first year after their transition to civilian status is particularly high and cuts across all demographic groups and service cohorts.”<sup>16</sup> As a result, the Department of Veterans Affairs has developed several transition assistance programs to help veterans navigate the challenges of a post-military life. For example, the “Solid Start” transition program was initiated in December 2019, intentionally calling or

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<sup>14</sup> Parker, *The American Veterans Experience*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Executive Order no. 13822, Code of Federal Regulations, title 3, § 630 (2018), accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-executive-order-supporting-veterans-transition-uniformed-service-civilian-life/>.

<sup>16</sup> Leo Shane III, *Newly separated veterans will now get phone calls from the VA to talk about benefits and support services*, December 27, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/2019/12/27/newly-separated-veterans-will-now-get-phone-calls-from-the-va-to-talk-about-benefits-and-support-services/>.

emailing every newly separated service member at least three times during their first year of separation from military service.

The Armed Services has recognized the importance of an effective transition program for veterans leaving military service since 1917 when the U.S. Government first initiated a formal benefits system in support of World War I veterans and their families. During World War II Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, also known as the *GI Bill of Rights*, which "dramatically transformed the concept of veterans' benefits"<sup>17</sup>, providing veterans' educational and vocational training benefits, a federally funded home, farm, or business loan with no down payment, and unemployment compensation. Korean War veterans enjoyed the same kinds of benefits with the addition of providing them access to regional transition assistance centers for vocational training and job placement.

Vietnam War Era (1961-1975) veterans were the first military members who faced significant transition issues and challenges when they returned to civilian life. First, these veterans were the first members of the Armed Services to separate from the military and return home within days after being in a combat zone. The sudden culture shock caused veterans greater adjustment difficulties than most in previous wars. Secondly, Vietnam returned home to a Nation filled with a growing anti-war sentiment. Instead of being welcomed home to crowds of grateful Americans, Vietnam War veterans were often confronted at US ports of entry by angry crowds spewing hate-filled remarks about the Armed Services and the war. This all too frequent and disrespectful treatment for returning Vietnam veterans "presented special readjustment problems for them. Many veterans reported feeling isolated and alienated from their peers and society in general."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs, "VA History In Brief," May/June 2005, accessed July 10, 2020 [https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/archives/docs/history\\_in\\_brief.pdf](https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/archives/docs/history_in_brief.pdf), 13.

<sup>18</sup> "VA History in Brief," 19.

Looking for ways to support Vietnam veterans, the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration initiated several new measures to assistance veterans before they were discharged, assigning transition counselors at separation centers across the United States and on military bases throughout the world, including one in Vietnam, to assist service members in their transition back to civilian life. In 1968 U.S. Veterans Assistance Centers (USVAC) were opened to “bring together at one-stop locations the combined services and resources of many Federal agencies and groups”<sup>19</sup> to help veterans adjust quickly and easily to civilian life. Additionally, the Department of Defense established Project Transition to support veterans with vocational skills or professional updates for use in civilian life, vocational counseling, job placement opportunities, and other transition assistance needs prior to their separation from the military.

In 1991 the National Defense Authorization Act amended Title 10 of the United States Code, the official codification of the general and permanent laws regarding the role of the Armed Services, authorizing a comprehensive transition assistance services program for military members and their spouses. It also mandated that military members attend pre-separation counseling 180 days prior to their separation from the military. The program also provided employment assistance, job training, and other transition services to military members.

In 2011 President Barack Obama signed into law the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) To Hire Heroes Act directing all military members to participate in the Department of Defense’s Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to help them cope with the stress of separating from the military and to assist them in obtaining meaningful employment that matches their unique skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities. The TAP also provides to each pre-separating military member “an individualized assessment of the various positions of civilian employment in the

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<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Waldman, “Viet Nam war veterans—transition to civilian life,” *Monthly Labor Review* 93, no. 11 (November 1970), 25-6.

private sector for which such member may be qualified as a result of the skills developed by such member through various military occupational specialties (MOS), successful completion of resident training courses, attaining various military ranks or rates, or other military experiences.”<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, and primarily due to the separation of church and state concerns, the Department of Defense offers no ministry-specific transition programs or platforms for military chaplains who separate or retire from the Armed Services. Thus, chaplains arguably face a greater transition challenge than their fellow veterans finding their “place” back into the vocational ministry community.

For most military chaplains, and Southern Baptist chaplains in particular, a transition process back into the civilian ministry is virtually non-existent. Chaplains, for the most part, must take the initiative on their own to search for ministry positions through denominational referral system platforms, seminary alumni placement offices, virtual bulletin boards where churches and religious organizations post available ministry positions, online job search websites, ministry consulting firm listings, social media sites, the ecclesiastical endorsing agency, and networking with pastors serving in church contexts and geographical locations that appeal to the chaplain’s ministry focus. Additionally, churches and denominational agencies have very little awareness of the depth of pastoral education, personal experience, and professional competencies that military chaplains have the potential of contributing to the ministry of the local church or other vocational ministry needs.

### **The Problem of Re-entry**

Despite the Armed Services’ best efforts to ensure that veterans experience a smooth transition back to civilian life, readjustment for veterans in transition comes with numerous

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<sup>20</sup> *Vow To Hire Heroes Act of 2011*, Public Law 112-56, *US Statutes at Large* 674 (2011): 714-735, accessed June 12, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ56/PLAW-112publ56.pdf>.

challenges, even more so for a military chaplain who must often find a pastoral position on their own. In reality, “little is known about the factors associated with leaving the armed forces, or what predicts subsequent employment success for veterans.”<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the key indicator that determines a military chaplain’s successful transition back to civilian life is their ability to overcome the dynamic of “re-entry” or “re-entry stress.”<sup>22</sup> Foreign missionaries, Peace Corps volunteers, employees of multi-national companies, and former prisoners re-entering society face this same challenge.

Re-entry is the process that occurs when the individual attempts to return to the social system of which he once was a part. In re-entering the former social system, he may try to regain his former status, or because his values have shifted while away, he may reject his former position and try to redefine his relationship to those around him. In either case, the re-entry process is likely to be slow, painful, and under certain circumstances, terrifying.<sup>23</sup>

Military chaplains, like most veterans, face numerous personal and relational re-entry issues when they retire or separate from military service and return to civilian life. First, re-entry carries with it a deep sense of personal loss. A recent study of 288 returning missionaries found that “nostalgia and homesickness were their second most difficult problem”<sup>24</sup> experienced during transition. Prior to military members officially retiring from the service, they attend a retirement ceremony held in their honor. A military band usually plays a repertoire of patriotic music for the honorees, including the old Scottish folk tune “Auld Lang Syne”, roughly translated “for old times’ sake.” According to American musicologist and composer Roger Lee Hall, “Auld Lang Syne” was

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<sup>21</sup> A. Nikolaou Iverson, V. Greenberg, N. Unwin, C. Hull, L. Hotopf, M. Dandeker, C. Ross, J. and Wessely, S. (2005) “What Happens to British Veterans When They Leave the Armed Forces?” *The European Journal of Public Health* Vol. 15(2), 175.

<sup>22</sup> Marjorie F. Foyle, *Honorably Wounded: Stress Among Christian Workers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2001), 223.

<sup>23</sup> Diane Jansson, “Return to Society: Problematic Features of the Re-entry Process,” *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* 13, no 3 (July 1975): 136.

<sup>24</sup> L. A. Moore, B. V. Jones, & C. N. Austin, “Predictors of Reverse Culture Shock Among North American Church of Christ Missionaries”, *Journal of Psychology & Theology*, 15(4), 1987, 336-7.

originally sung at funerals, recalling friends who had died in the previous year. The historical tradition of the song being played at a military retirement ceremony is for the veteran honoree to pause one last time in uniform to remember the friendships made with their fellow service members over the years, to reflect on the memories of their military career, and to re-envision a happy, healthy, and prosperous life beyond military service.

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, in his last official address to a military audience after serving fifty-nine years in uniform, spoke to the Corps of Cadets at West Point regarding his heart's deep attachment to the Armed Services:

The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here. My days of old have vanished - tone and tints. They have gone glimmering through the dreams of things that were. Their memory is one of wondrous beauty, watered by tears and coaxed and caressed by the smiles of yesterday. I listen then, but with thirsty ear, for the witching melody of faint bugles blowing reveille, of far drums beating the long roll. In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange, mournful mutter of the battlefield. But in the evening of my memory I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and re-echoes: Duty, Honor, Country.<sup>25</sup>

Several years ago, I participated in the official decommissioning of an historic military chapel at Fort McPherson, Georgia located on a military base established by the United States Army in 1885. When decommissioning a military chapel, chaplains lead a formal deconsecration ceremony which includes the removal of all the sacred items or religious symbols within the chapel, including the large altar Bible. Military tradition recommends that, after removing all the sacred items, the chapel pastor lift the altar Bible, slam it shut, and walk with it solemnly down the aisle, past the seated and prayerful congregation, and out of the chapel. After the service, an elderly veteran's widow said to me, "Chaplain, when you closed the Bible on the altar, it reminded me of

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<sup>25</sup> General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, "Farewell Speech to the Corps of Cadets at West Point" (speech, May 12, 1962), accessed July 22, 2020, <https://www.westpointaog.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=2229>.

the time when the funeral director closed the lid on my husband's coffin here in this chapel. My heart is breaking once again. Where do I attend worship services now?"<sup>26</sup>

The sense of loss and grief is often heightened during the re-entry process. Some veterans transitioning from military service still bear the invisible wounds of war after having personally suffered a traumatic experience while in combat, serving alongside a fellow service member who was killed or wounded in action, or participating in or witnessing a military action that violated their moral conscience. Military chaplains experience loss like their fellow service members. One unnamed chaplain, struggling with his painful war memories, remarked,

I lost my compassion at some point during my first deployment to Iraq. I had heard 'Amazing Grace' played so many times at memorial ceremonies for our soldiers killed in action that I started becoming emotionless as we honored our fallen soldiers. When I returned home, I remember praying for the Lord to give me back my tears.<sup>27</sup>

Another military chaplain, clinically diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, tearfully confided in me, "I went with my soldiers on a recovery mission to the site of a helicopter crash and spent hours with them picking up body parts and human remains of my soldiers. I feel like I left a part of my soul at the crash site on the side of that mountain in Afghanistan."<sup>28</sup> Some chaplains who experience "re-entry stress"<sup>29</sup> or "reverse culture shock" struggle with periods of confusion, lethargy, uncertainty, and mild depression after coming home. I personally experienced a season of grief after retiring from the military, becoming the proverbial "couch potato", constantly watching meaningless television shows for several weeks. (By the way, I found that the television series "Law and Order" is aired on some cable network twenty-four hours a day!).

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<sup>26</sup> Comment from a military widow (name is withheld to protect the individual's privacy), June 7, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with a retired military chaplain (name withheld to protect their privacy), May 20, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Comment by a retired military chaplain (name withheld to protect their privacy), November 11, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Marjorie F. Foyle, *Honorably Wounded: Stress Among Christian Workers* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2001), 223.

A second major re-entry challenge that veterans struggle with after retiring or separating from service is the loss of identity. Eric Haney, a founding member of the U.S. Army's elite Delta Force wrote: "The Military is a profession that brands itself on the soul and causes you forever after to view the world through a unique set of mental filters. The more profound and intense the experience, the hotter the brand, and the deeper it is plunged into you."<sup>30</sup> When an individual joins the Armed Services for any period of time, they quickly lose their civilian identity and become enculturated to military life through their basic and advanced individual training. They acquire values, norms, rules, and disciplines necessary to properly function within the context of the military's unique institutional culture.

Upon separating or retiring from the service, veterans are expected to leave their military identity behind and become civilians once again. This is not always an easy process. "Though soldiers don uniforms and then take them off, the transitions are rarely seamless. For many, soldiering is not just a job or career; it is an identity, it is who they become. Leaving it behind is not easy."<sup>31</sup> Several years ago, the U.S. Army initiated a transition program for soldiers leaving the military called "Soldier For Life". The basic purpose for this initiative was twofold: 1) to encourage soldiers and their families to instill the values, ethos, and leadership qualities learned during their military service into their civilian communities and, 2) to remind retired or transitioned soldiers that they forever kept their identity as an Army family.

In that same sense, military chaplains maintain their ministry identity as a "chaplain" far beyond their separation from the Armed Services. In fact, they often struggle with their new personal identity as a "retired" military chaplain or "Mr./Ms." Smith, titles foreign to them after years of being known as a chaplain and commissioned officer. Shortly after retiring from the

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<sup>30</sup> Eric L. Haney, *Inside Delta Force: The Story of America's Elite Counterterrorist Unit* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2002), vii.

<sup>31</sup> Sherman, *The Untold War*, 4.

military, a pastor invited me to lunch and gave me two incredibly wise pieces of advice. First, he told me that I needed to “take a knee”, sit on a church pew for a season of time, and reflect on the last forty years of my military ministry. Second, he told me, “The hardest question you’re going to deal with now is, ‘What is God’s will for me now?’” The pastor was right. Ever since that day I seldom refer to myself as “retired”. The Lord has simply redirected my life from military service back to the civilian ministry. At the same time, I’m a military chaplain...for life!

A third re-entry challenge faced by most veterans after leaving military service is the loss of community. The Armed Services strongly promotes a strong sense of belonging and fraternal connectivity. Military units take great pride in their lineage and battle history, reinforcing their tribal loyalty to each other with creeds, songs, values, heraldry, and mascots. The Army’s Warrior Ethos, a set of principles and professional beliefs that characterize the American Soldier states, “I will always place the mission first, I will never accept defeat, I will never quit, and I will never leave a fallen comrade.” Military members consider themselves to be a “band of brothers and sisters”. They are taught to always have a “battle buddy” and to watch each other’s back. They never leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield but take every possible effort to rescue, recover, or return a service member home to their family. Soldiers almost never find themselves alone. Journalist Sebastian Junger, after spending time with American soldiers at a remote outpost in Afghanistan, remarked,

One of the most notable things about life in the military is that you’re almost never alone. Day after day, month after month, you are close enough to speak to, if not touch, a dozen or more people. We slept ten to a hut in bunks that were only ten feet apart. I could touch three other men with my outstretched hand from where I lay. The outpost was attacked dozens of times, but we always felt safe because we were in a group.<sup>32</sup>

One reason that military chaplains experience difficulties re-entering the civilian ministry stems from the fact that they, too, have experienced the strong sense of brotherhood and community

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<sup>32</sup> Sebastian Junger, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2016), 94.

instilled into them by their military ministry. They have participated as a member of a corps of chaplains, supported a common ministry strategy, and shared ministry responsibilities with their chaplain peers of various faith backgrounds. Additionally, they spent years providing ministry in a completely different cultural environment than a civilian church setting. For military chaplains re-entering civilian life, these differences include “the wearing of uniforms, rigorous physical training, norms of behavior (strict obedience to authority), the language of military acronyms, regimentation, and following deeply held traditions, beliefs, and values.”<sup>33</sup> During one of my interviews, a chaplain told me that he missed the level of accountability he experienced in the military service. Upon returning to civilian life, he has dealt with an increasing sense of isolation, depression, and disconnectedness with his denomination that he never experienced as a military chaplain.

A fourth re-entry challenge faced by veterans and chaplains is their struggle over a new sense of purpose. With less than one percent of the US population serving in the Armed Services, most Americans know very little about the education, training, and skills that military members bring back home to the civilian workplace. Additionally, veterans often find themselves representing one of the most unreached people groups and underutilized members of the Nation’s work force, “hiding in plain sight and separated by a common language from 99.9% of the population that hasn’t served.”<sup>34</sup>

The Armed Services instills and reinforces a sense of purpose and meaningful work to service members throughout their military career. The Army, for example, requires newly enlisted troops to memorize “The Soldiers Creed” which they recite daily with passion:

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<sup>33</sup> Robert R. Ulin, *Transitions 2.0- A Field Guide For Mid-Level Professionals and Veterans* (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2017), §10.2.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew J. Louis, *Mission Transition: Navigating the Opportunities and Obstacles to Your Post-Military Career*. (Nashville: Harper Collins, 2019), xii.

I am an American Soldier. I am a warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States, and I live the Army Values. ...I am an expert and I am a professional. I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat. I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life. I am an American Soldier.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, the Air Force motivates Airmen of all ranks regarding their intrinsic value, sense of purpose, and significance to the Nation by their embodiment of “The Airman’s Creed:

“I am an American Airman, Guardian of Freedom and Justice, My Nation’s Sword and Shield, Its Sentry and Avenger. I defend my Country with my Life. I am an American Airman.”<sup>36</sup>

The “Sailor’s Creed” of the United States Navy governs virtually all aspects of a Sailor’s identity. It is the cornerstone of Navy culture, often recited like a pledge of allegiance, reminding all Navy personnel of their importance to the American people:

“I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America and I will obey the orders of those appointed over me. I represent the fighting spirit of the Navy and those who have gone before me to defend freedom and democracy around the world. I proudly serve my country’s Navy combat team with Honor, Courage and Commitment. I am committed to excellence and the fair treatment of all.”<sup>37</sup>

In like manner, the Armed Forces Chaplaincies reinforce the significance of military chaplains through their respective Service mottos: “For God and Country” (Army); “Called To Serve” (Navy); and “Glorifying God, Serving Airmen, Pursuing Excellence” (Air Force). When military chaplains transition out of the Armed Services back into the civilian ministry, they often struggle with the loss of their sense of purpose, personal worth, and pastoral competence. Fifty years ago, retired US Navy Rear Admiral Chaplain Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr. remarked:

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<sup>35</sup> The Soldier’s Creed, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.army.mil/values/soldiers.html>.

<sup>36</sup> The Airmen’s Creed, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.airforce.com/mission/vision>.

<sup>37</sup> The Sailor’s Creed, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/heritage/customs-and-traditions0/the-sailor-s-creed.html>.

By any standard the military chaplaincy is a significant part of the American churches. But the churches do not seem to realize it. Strangely enough, no careful and reasonably objective analysis of the nature of this ministry, its military setting, and its relationship to the churches, has ever been made. If an interested churchman were to visit his public library- or even the library of the nearest theological seminary—looking for a basic book describing the military chaplaincy, he would find that there is no such thing.<sup>38</sup>

Since then, more books have been written on the military chaplaincy, but very few capture its distinct nature and “value added” to the local church and other civilian ministries.

First, military chaplains are simply pastors in uniform. They perform ministry like the typical pastor except for two things: military chaplains live and train in the same community with their troops, and they deploy to combat with them. Second, they serve as religious liberty advocates for their assigned military units, ensuring that every service member has the freedom to exercise their religious freedom in accordance with the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Third, military chaplains perform or provide for the individual religious requests of their troops in accordance with their own faith, beliefs, and practices. Fourth, military chaplains serve in a collegial relationship with their fellow chaplains representing over 225 faith groups and endorsing agencies, cooperating without compromising their own personal faith group distinctives. Fifth, military chaplains constantly live in the tension of being a religious leader as well as a commissioned officer.

Throughout their tenure in the Armed Services, military chaplains have often served as the sole religious leader to hundreds or even thousands of service members from diverse cultural backgrounds. They have advised military and civilian leaders of all ranks on matters of religion, morale, and ethical concerns. In some cases, they have served as a religious leader liaison with other nations’ religious leaders. They have performed or provided continuous and comprehensive religious services in peacetime and in combat environments, received advanced civilian education

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<sup>38</sup> Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr. *The Churches and the Chaplaincy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 5.

training, developed strategic leadership competencies, mentored and coached other chaplains, and acquired advanced crisis counseling skills which would greatly benefit any local church or denomination. And yet, military chaplains find themselves being underutilized with their wealth of pastoral experience.

A fifth reason that military chaplains have such a difficult time transitioning back into a civilian ministry setting is that their ecclesiastical authority has little or no formal transition ministry program in place for returning military chaplains or foreign missionaries. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention endorses the largest number of chaplains for the US Armed Forces. However, in the denomination's seventy-nine-year history of endorsing military chaplains, it has never developed an intentional transition program for their chaplains re-entering the civilian ministry. Upon retirement from military service, Southern Baptist chaplains simply receive a certificate of appreciation and a retirement letter. Those who separate from the service before retirement don't even get that recognition for their military ministry. Unfortunately, the denomination currently has no mechanism in place to provide a transition ministry process for military chaplains or to track the number of military chaplains who re-enter civilian ministry after separating from the Armed Services.

Southern Baptists aren't the only denomination that has little or no effective transition program for military chaplains. A thirty-two-year-old missional study on the transition of military chaplains back into the civilian ministry pointed out that "most churches have no system in place to help the chaplain to re-enter the civilian ministry."<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the study pointed out that most denominations and mission agencies have "few concrete programs in place to aid in the transition."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Peter J. Kraak, "The Transition from the Military Chaplaincy to the Civilian Ministry" (D.Min. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986), 58-59, ProQuest (AAT unknown).

<sup>40</sup> Kraak, 74.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod denomination is a recent exception to this trend. Concerned that their military chaplains were not receiving a call to a congregation upon returning to civilian ministry, the Synod appointed a task force in 2016 to “study the need for a placement process for returning military chaplains and missionaries...and to encourage congregations and other entities in calling qualified candidates in a timely manner.”<sup>41</sup> They firmly believed that the lack of a re-entry program was poor stewardship of the pastors entrusted to them by God.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this thesis-project is to consider the challenges facing Southern Baptist military chaplains transitioning back into the civilian ministry setting; to determine the sources that contribute to a successful re-entry; to recommend effective pastoral care support to military chaplains transitioning back to civilian ministry; and, to initiate a formal transition program within the North American Mission Board for Southern Baptist military chaplains. This is important for several reasons.

First, military chaplains begin their ministry experience within the context of a local church. It seems only plausible that they would return to the local church ministry setting to provide congregations strategic leadership skills, pastoral education, crisis counseling training, and evangelism best practices learned from their military ministry career.

Second, the calling to the ministry is transitory in its very nature. In a recent study by Lifeway, research showed that the “median tenure for full-time pastors is six years.”<sup>42</sup> According to ReMAP II, a 2003 survey of mission agencies conducted by the World Evangelical Alliance, “the

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<sup>41</sup> The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 2016 Convention Resolution Update), *Resolution 3-10A “To Appoint a Task Force to Study the Call Process for Returning Missionary and Military Chaplains and Other Rostered Church Workers Without a Call,”* October 2017, accessed April 14, 2020, file:///Users/dcarver/Downloads/Resolution%203-10A%20Task%20Force%20(3).pdf.

<sup>42</sup> Thom S. Rainer, “Six Reasons Pastoral Tenure May Be Increasing” (Blog, March 15, 2017), accessed April 24, 2020, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/03/six-reasons-pastoral-tenure-may-be-increasing/>.

average length of service (on the mission field) was twelve years.”<sup>43</sup> This project will provide helpful transition planning guidance not only for military chaplains but for pastors and missionaries as well who will inevitably experience continued ministry transitions in the lifetime of their vocational calling.

Third, this project will demonstrate the critical role that Southern Baptist churches play in welcoming their military chaplains back home. Having commissioned and sent out their pastors into the military chaplaincy, churches must look for creative and intentional ways to affirm military chaplains’ calling into the ministry once they return home to their sending church.

### **Summary**

Military chaplains should “prepare well in advance of leaving the military”<sup>44</sup> to ensure a successful transition to the civilian ministry. During numerous interviews with retired military chaplains<sup>45</sup>, several themes continued to surface as key factors that led to their achieving a successful transition from the military and a positive re-entry experience.

First, they remained strongly connected to their sending church throughout their military ministry, especially during their last twelve months of military service. They accomplished this through phone calls, social media, personal visits, and networking with local, state and regional denominational officials.

Second, military chaplains received timely pastoral support and personal assistance from their endorsing agency throughout their transition process. They began communicating regularly

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<sup>43</sup> Rob Hay, ed., *WorthKeeping: Global Perspectives on Good Practice in Ministry Retention* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Hay, *Worthkeeping*, 78.

<sup>45</sup> Informal interviews by the author with Southern Baptist military chaplains (names withheld to protect the privacy of the chaplains) during the Annual Southern Baptist Chaplain Training on February 26-28, 2018 in California; April 23-28, 2018 in Oklahoma; and October 22-24, 2018 in North Carolina.

with their endorsing agency approximately twelve months prior to their official separation date from military service.

Finally, military chaplains used their transition period to reflect on their vocational calling into the ministry. Some chaplains stated that their transition out of the Armed Services caused them to question the validity, longevity, and passion of their calling into the ministry, especially during the critical months that followed their separation from the military chaplaincy.

### **Overview of the Thesis-Project**

Approximately fifty endorsed Southern Baptist military chaplains separate or retire from the Armed Services each year presumably with the goal of returning to the pastoral staff of a local church or another type of vocational ministry. Unfortunately, the Southern Baptist Convention has no ministry transition platform in place to assist these chaplains. The insights gained from this study will serve as a catalyst to assist military chaplains during their transition from the Armed Services to re-envision a personal strategy that best utilizes their ministry competences developed and experienced while serving as a military chaplain.

This project takes place in three phases: the distribution of a ministry transition survey as well as in-person and/or telephonic interviews with military chaplains who have separated or retired from the Armed Services, feedback from a ministry transition presentation delivered at regional professional development training events for endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains, and the implementation of a transition program in support of Southern Baptist military chaplains who have retired or will leave the Armed Services within the next twelve months. This project also has the potential of assisting Southern Baptist churches and denominational entities in the development of an effective ministry transition platform for returning foreign missionaries or pastors in transition that will result in longer retentions in vocational ministry.

In support of this project, I have accessed a list of one hundred fifty-seven endorsed Southern Baptist military chaplains who have transitioned from the Armed Services from 2010 to 2020 back to civilian status. I will distribute a valid survey along with interview questions to each of these chaplains for a suitable quality analysis that will explore the validity of three hypotheses concerning a military chaplain's ability to successfully transition back into the civilian ministry:

- Hypothesis 1: A clear understanding of God's calling to the ministry will positively influence the transition from military chaplain to civilian pastor.
- Hypothesis 2: A strong connection with the denominational endorsing agency and a local church will positively influence a military chaplain's transition to civilian ministry.
- Hypothesis 3: The longevity of ministry prior to military service will positively influence the transition from military chaplain to civilian pastor.
- Hypothesis 4: An intentional exit strategy will positively influence the transition from the military chaplaincy to a civilian ministry role.

Chapter 2 will describe the theological rationale for military chaplains to develop an intentional strategy for ministry transition. Although most military chaplains hope to complete a successful twenty-year career, a number of variables could prevent them from achieving that desired goal, including such things as a mediocre ministry performance, failure to maintain physical fitness standards, or a debilitating health issue. I will discuss a number of biblical examples that shape my approach in developing a theological rationale for ministry transition planning.

Chapter 3 will provide an overview of various books, publications, articles, and studies that address the challenges and opportunities faced by military chaplains during their transition from the Armed Services and re-entry into civilian ministry. This chapter will also look briefly at the similar transition challenges experienced by foreign missionaries during their re-entry back home to their country of origin.

Chapter 4 will introduce this thesis-project's methodology, research design, data collection approach, and evaluation of the project's approach. I will obtain information for this project through a quantitative survey on ministry transition provided to all Southern Baptist military chaplains who separated from the Armed Services between 2010 and 2020. I will then collect and analyze qualitative data by interviewing four retired military chaplains regarding their transition experience back to civilian life and ministry.

I will discuss the outcomes of the study, present final summaries and conclusion formed from the project, and recommendations for future studies. It will document what the Southern Baptist Convention's Chaplaincy Team initiated in order to provide pastoral support and personal assistance to endorsed military chaplains during their transition from military service back into the civilian ministry setting. The project design, best practices, and lessons learned will become the foundation for a transition ministry platform in support of the over 3600 endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains. Hopefully, it will become a helpful resource for Southern Baptist missionaries, pastors in transition, and other denominational endorsing agencies.

Chaplain 5 will summarize my findings regarding the importance and establishment of an effective ministry transition platform for military chaplains as they return to civilian life and continued ministry opportunities. One of the primary goals of this chapter will be to increase the awareness of the lifetime calling to the pastoral ministry, regardless of the ministry setting.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

It's not the changes that do you in, it's the transitions. They aren't the same thing. Change is situational: the move to a new site, a new CEO replaces the founder, the reorganization of the roles on the team, and new technology. Transition, on the other hand, is psychological; it is a three-phased process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about.<sup>1</sup>

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...”<sup>2</sup>

My transition into the military chaplaincy was a significant emotional experience, so much so that I still vividly recall that tough season of adjustment now over forty years ago. It began shortly after resigning from my church as the senior pastor and taking the oath of office to become a commissioned officer. That moment temporarily marked the end of my civilian ministry for the time being and the beginning of the military chaplaincy journey. Over the next several months I wrestled with a number of common ministry transition issues, including the cultural acclimation from a local church setting to military life, a pastoral leadership adjustment to serve within the context of a pluralistic institutional environment, the reestablishment of our family's life and support community, the surprising disappointment at my church's lack of understanding regarding the military chaplaincy, and a personal sense of grief and loss from the singular ministry role as the pastor of a local church. This was only the beginning of countless transitions I would face as a military chaplain, a process that is integral to all members of the United States Armed Services.

A frequent Bible verse used in official military ceremonies is, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord say, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I, send me!’ ”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Make the Most of Change* (Boston: Da Capo Books, 2016), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 6:8.

Many of those in uniform sincerely believe they live that verse daily in their sacrificial service to the Nation. In 2008 the Honorable Pete Geren, Secretary of the United States Army, began his commencement remarks to the United States Military Academy's Class of 2008 with the familiar words of the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah,

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then, I said, "Here am I; Send me." Isaiah, Chapter 6, verse 8. Today we gather to recognize...men and women who, in the spring of 2004, answered the call of our nation, a nation at war-, "Here am I. Send me." This afternoon, they will be commissioned as Second Lieutenants. And over the next year, our Army will send them around our Nation and around the world to one of 80 countries where American Soldiers are serving the cause of freedom.<sup>4</sup>

At some point in their calling to the ministry, every pastor, missionary, chaplain, or Christian leader has presumably had that “Isaiah moment” and boldly declared their desire and willingness to wholeheartedly serve the Lord’s purposes here on earth. Their faith-based, prayerful, and unconditional calling to ministry implies their readiness to go whenever and wherever the Lord leads them, regardless of the cost, the continent, or the commitment. In one of His last messages to the disciples before He ascended into Heaven, the Risen Lord Jesus Christ commanded them to take the hope of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, beginning “in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”<sup>5</sup>

Since believers in Jesus Christ confess that they “walk by faith, not by sight”<sup>6</sup>, why do Christians often struggle with transitions in their life as non-believers? Why do most seminaries offer little or no courses on ministry transition? What type of re-entry ministry do churches provide for military chaplains and international missionaries returning from their respective mission fields? More specifically, why is it often so challenging for Southern Baptist military chaplains, who

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<sup>4</sup> Secretary of the Army Pete Geren, *West Point Commencement Remarks* (Speech, United States Military Academy, May 31, 2008), accessed September 14, 2020, [https://www.army.mil/article/9573/west\\_point\\_commencement\\_remarks\\_by\\_secretary\\_of\\_the\\_army\\_pete\\_geren](https://www.army.mil/article/9573/west_point_commencement_remarks_by_secretary_of_the_army_pete_geren).

<sup>5</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17.

experience multiple assignments and combat deployments during their career, to transition back to the civilian ministry environment where they began their ministry?

This chapter will attempt to answer these questions. First, using several Biblical examples, it will examine some of the key principles the Bible teaches regarding ministry transitions. Second, it will discuss the unique transition phases faced by those called into the military chaplaincy. Third, it will recommend an effective theological framework for military chaplains to prepare for and manage their inevitable return to a civilian ministry setting.

### **Biblical Examples of Transition**

#### **The Abraham Principle: Transitions Are Signposts To Our Destiny**

The word “transition”, derived from the Latin word *transitionem* (nominative *transition*), is a noun of action meaning “a going across or over”<sup>7</sup> from one place or state of being to another. In rhetoric, a speaker transitions from one topic to another by means of a connecting thought for the discourse to sound natural and unified in its delivery. In music, one can detect the transition in a melody when the notes change in conjunct (consecutively, e.g., Beethoven’s “Ode To Joy”) or in disjunct (large intervals or “leaps” between one note and the next, e.g., “The Star-Spangled Banner”). In sermon preparation, transitions are essential in carrying the listener forward to the next point by using clear, short, and direct reviews of the previous points. In fact, effective sermon transitions are like highway signs or “...turns in the road, offering direction toward the (driver’s) destination.”<sup>8</sup>

The transitory experience of human life is a common theme throughout the Bible. Joyce Rupp, in her book *Praying Our Goodbyes*, refers to this as “the hello-goodbye-hello pattern of the

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<sup>7</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “transition” (Lancaster, PA: Douglas Harper, 2001-2021), accessed on November 12, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/transition>.

<sup>8</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One With Authority* (Saint Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 85.

human journey.”<sup>9</sup> Abraham began his first “hello-goodbye-hello” geographical move away from his hometown of Ur in southern Mesopotamia when he was approximately seventy years old. Terah, Abraham’s father, moved the entire family six hundred miles north and settled in the city of Haran, a tranquil resting point for merchants and travelers on the major caravan route between the east and west. The small town was surrounded by beautiful farmland and a flowing river, an idyllic place to live and raise a family. In fact, it was so perfect that Abraham’s father seemed to have temporarily forgotten about going to Canaan, the land of promise.

Settled into life in Haran with his family, Abraham was perhaps surprised when God gave him a no-notice directive, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”<sup>10</sup> For the next one hundred years he would travel over two thousand miles towards his ultimate destination in the land of Canaan. Along the way he would constantly adapt into leadership roles required at various points on the journey, including becoming a shrewd merchant, a successful herdsman, an accomplished interpreter, a diplomatic negotiator, a fierce warrior, and an elderly father.

Throughout his multiple life transitions, Abraham spent years hailing and farewelling angels, the Pharaoh, regional kings and princes, and his own relatives while making a temporary home for his family in palaces, towns, huts, tents, and in the open fields. All of these countless experiences taught Abraham to implicitly trust the Lord on the journey, “...and (God) counted it to him as righteousness.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, all of his “hello-goodbye-hello” experiences “...etched a crescent of hope and faith so indelibly that it determined the motive and course of events for

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<sup>9</sup> Joyce Rupp, *Praying Our Goodbyes* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009), 32.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 12:1.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 15:6.

centuries down to this day and far beyond the borders of the nations.”<sup>12</sup> As a result of Abraham’s faithful submission to God through his many life transitions, he achieved his true destiny as “the father of a multitude of nations.”<sup>13</sup>

### The Moses Principle: Transitions Build Our Trust In God

Moses’ life-changing transition in Exodus chapter three is one of the most compelling passages and a pinnacle moment in the Biblical story. At this point in his life, Moses had long said goodbye forty years earlier to his royal status in Pharaoh’s household, accepted his fate as a fugitive from justice for killing an Egyptian, and settled into the simple, common life of a shepherd. One day Moses had an unexpected Divine appointment through an angel of the Lord in a burning bush who delivered his next tour of duty instructions, “Come I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”<sup>14</sup>

After a brief discourse with the Lord regarding why he thought God should choose a more qualified leader, Moses responded to God’s new transition plan for his life in humble obedience, accepting the challenge to lead “about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children”<sup>15</sup> on a forty-year journey into the Promised Land of Canaan. This miraculous accomplishment required a radical decision on Moses’ part, choosing to say goodbye to the “treasures of Egypt”<sup>16</sup> and hello to the unknown journey of faith Almighty God had mapped out for his life. As a result of his constant dependence on the Lord for supernatural provision, protection,

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<sup>12</sup> Martin, Malachi, “Footsteps of Abraham” *New York Times*. March 13, 1983, <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/03/13/travel/footsteps-of-abraham-by-malachi-martin.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 17:5.

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 3:10.

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 12:37.

<sup>16</sup> Hebrews 11:36.

peace, and personal guidance while negotiating the Sinai desert, God rewarded him by “...(making) known His ways to Moses.”<sup>17</sup>

### The Joseph Principle: Transitions Reveal The Providence of God

Some transitions, on the surface, appear to have devastating consequences. In Joseph’s case, as recorded in Genesis 37, he experienced a dramatic event that all but threatened to end his life. His brothers, full of jealousy and rage against their favored brother, determined that it was time to say goodbye to Joseph forever. They hated him for his grandiose dreams, his prophetic words, and especially the undue attention he received from their father (Jacob) who “...loved Joseph more than any other of his sons.”<sup>18</sup> On one occasion, Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers pasturing their flocks. When his brothers saw him from a distance, they decided among themselves to use his fortuitous visit to kill Joseph and throw him into a thirty-two-feet deep, empty water well. Fortunately, they had a change of heart and instead, seeing an approaching caravan of merchants, sold him as a slave to Midianite traders who carried him five hundred miles south into Egypt where Joseph said hello to his new master, Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh’s personal security force.

Joseph’s decades of life in Egypt presented some of the greatest transition challenges recorded in the Bible, including the traumatic abandonment by his brothers, separation from family, the loss of trust and innocence, frequent social status changes, an adjustment to prison life, overcoming cultural barriers, and perhaps struggling with a repressed anguish of soul over his life’s tragic circumstances. From a religious perspective, he faced the daily challenges of living in “a hedonistic culture opposed to God. He was all alone with no external support to keep him on the straight and narrow; it was only his integrity, his own heart”<sup>19</sup> that kept him faithful, righteous, and

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<sup>17</sup> Psalm 103:7.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 37:3.

<sup>19</sup> Larry Fowler, *Raising A Modern Day Joseph* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2009), 57.

committed to God. Joseph's godly example during his frequent transition experiences was so evident that the pagan Pharaoh remarked, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?"<sup>20</sup>

However, Joseph's twenty-two years of transition had taken its toll on his life. The Bible paints the picture of a man who had become numb to the thought of ever returning home, reconnecting with family, or reconciling with his brothers. In fact, it took a worldwide famine to help Joseph recognize God's Providence that required him to be in Egypt to save his family and preserve the future of Israel. As his brothers confessed to him remorse for their betrayal, "the floodgate of Joseph's pain that had been kept from conscious awareness all those years opened. And concurrent with the awareness of that pain, love and forgiveness finally surfaced as well."<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, Joseph was able to look at his seemingly negative transition experiences through the eyes of faith. When he finally reconciled with his brothers who had come to Egypt out of desperation for humanitarian relief, he said, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..."<sup>22</sup>

Joseph's story is a vivid reminder that, regardless of how difficult a ministry assignment may appear at the time, God's plan for our life will always prevail over the circumstances. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 11 answer states, God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions."

In January 1915 Oswald Chambers, a prominent early 20th century Scottish Baptist evangelist and teacher, was delivering a series of lectures at the Bible Training College in London

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 41:38.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel J. Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers: A Biblical Paradigm for the Optimal Handling of Traumatic Stress," *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Fall, 2001), accessed December 7, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27511547>, 339.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 50:20.

to students preparing for the mission field. Little did Chambers know at the time that in a few short months he would deploy during World War I as a British Army chaplain to a YMCA compound in the desert near Cairo, Egypt. He and his wife remained there to evangelize British Commonwealth soldiers throughout the war until his death in 1917 after failing to recover from an emergency appendectomy. His final words to his missionary students back at the Bible college were indeed prophetic:

Wherever the providence of God may dump us down, in a slum, in a shop, in the desert, we have to labor along the line of His direction. Never allow this thought—'I am of no use where I am,' because you certainly can be of no use where you are not! Wherever He has engineered your circumstances, pray.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Pilgrimage Of A Military Chaplain**

#### **The Call**

Long before an ordained pastor receives an endorsement by their respective faith group or denominational agency to become a military chaplain and takes the oath of office as a commissioned officer, they answer the call to the ministry. Although the Great Commission commands all Christian believers to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ “to all nations”<sup>24</sup>, some men and women come to the realization through their study of Scripture, prayer, and conviction of the Holy Spirit that the Lord is setting them apart to devote their entire lives to the ministry of the Word of God.

This inward calling manifests itself in a variety of personal experiences or encounters with God. God drafted Moses to the ministry at a burning bush in the Sinai desert. Shortly after Moses’ death, the Lord said to Joshua, “Now it’s your turn!” Samuel began to sense God’s call on his life

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<sup>23</sup> Oswald Chambers, *The Complete Works of Oswald Chambers* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, Publishers, 2000), 1325.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 24:47.

as a young boy, responding in childlike faith, “Speak, for your servant hears.”<sup>25</sup> God’s call on Jeremiah’s life was determined before his birth. God told him, “...before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”<sup>26</sup> The prophet Ezekiel, after recovering from a strange prophetic vision and spending seven days in silence, heard the Lord say, “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.”<sup>27</sup> Amos was living out his profession as a shepherd and farmer when the Lord told him, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”<sup>28</sup>

In the New Testament Zechariah foretold the ministry calling on his son, John the Baptist, before his birth,

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.<sup>29</sup>

The Apostle Paul had the original “Damascus Road experience” at his calling to the Gospel ministry. It was confirmed by Ananias, a disciple of Jesus Christ, who was told in a vision from the Lord to find a blind man named Saul with the news that he had a new calling on his life, “...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”<sup>30</sup> Jesus Christ told his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...”<sup>31</sup> For the past two

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Samuel 3:10.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremiah 1:5.

<sup>27</sup> Ezekiel 3:17.

<sup>28</sup> Amos 7:14.

<sup>29</sup> Luke 1: 75-79.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 9:15.

<sup>31</sup> John 15:16.

thousand years, and even today, countless followers of Jesus Christ have heard the Lord's timeless call on His disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."<sup>32</sup>

One clear indicator of a person's calling to the ministry is the confirmation from other Christians which normally occurring within the context of a local church setting. For example, shortly after the Apostle Paul's conversion experience, Barnabas vouched for his legitimate calling to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ before the disciples in Jerusalem, testifying that he had personally seen Paul "preaching boldly in the name of Jesus"<sup>33</sup> despite the death threats against him. Later in Paul's ministry, he immediately recognized Timothy's spiritual leadership potential primarily because "he was well spoken of by the (Christian) brothers and sisters"<sup>34</sup> in his community. As Timothy matured in his pastoral ministry, Paul encouraged him affirm the ministry calling on other "faithful men who will be able to teach others also."<sup>35</sup>

In 3 John the Apostle John gave a strong endorsement regarding Demetrius for his godly character and the fact that he had "received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself."<sup>36</sup> The late evangelical theologian Thomas Oden, reflecting on the importance of the internal and external aspect of a calling to the ministry writes:

The internal call is a result of the continued drawing of eliciting power of the Holy Spirit, which in time brings an individual closer to the church's outward call to ministry. The external call is an act of Christian community that by due process confirms that inward call. The inward and outer call is so crucial for both the candidate and the church.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew 4:19.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 9:27.

<sup>34</sup> Acts 16:3.

<sup>35</sup> 2 Timothy 2:2.

<sup>36</sup> 3 John. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1982), 25.

Several years ago, I served on a panel of military chaplains during a Vocations Day at a Christian university. The facilitator posed the opening question to each of us, “Why did you become a military chaplain?” I recounted my initial calling to the ministry as a fourteen-year-old, a life event as unequivocal and vivid as my personal salvation experience. I also described how the Lord convicted me from the Book of Hebrews 3:1-4 on the importance of remaining faithful to the calling to the ministry just as Jesus was “faithful to Him who appointed him.”<sup>38</sup> Finally, I emphasized the vital role the local church played during my discernment process. The next chaplain panel member responded to his calling to ministry question almost without hesitation, “I became a military chaplain because I wanted to do something good.”

The calling to the military chaplaincy, and the pastoral ministry for that matter, is far beyond some philanthropic endeavor to take care of people. It is a Divine mandate delivered through the Holy Spirit to Christ followers who are set apart for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The call to ministry is the undying evangelistic passion to faithfully share the Word of God “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread”<sup>39</sup> A clear call to the ministry is essential for setting the course for any future success or satisfaction in the life of a pastor, chaplain, missionary, or Christian leader.

### Preparation

According to the Biblical model, those called into the ministry often spend a season of time in private preparation, studying Scripture and praying intensely before launching their public ministry. Shortly after Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit “immediately drove him out into the wilderness”<sup>40</sup> where he spent forty days praying, fasting, and engaging in spiritual warfare with the

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<sup>38</sup> Hebrews 3:2.

<sup>39</sup> D. T. Niles, *That They May Have Life* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), 96.

<sup>40</sup> Mark 1:12.

devil. After the Resurrection Jesus stayed with his disciples forty days, teaching them about the kingdom of God and preparing them for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Paul went into the Arabian desert after his calling into the ministry and, according to the Biblical account, was personally taught by “a revelation of Jesus Christ.”<sup>41</sup> After returning to Damascus, he waited an additional three years before reporting to the Apostles in Jerusalem for ministry direction.

In the New Testament, God appointed the church as the spiritual gatekeeper for those discerning their calling to the ministry. The Apostle Paul exhorted Timothy, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.”<sup>42</sup> Additionally, the church is a spiritual laboratory and the ideal training ground where the called can learn, explore, and practice the art of ministry from experienced pastors and godly role models in the congregation. It has a uniquely important role in assessing, training, deploying, and coaching those preparing for the ministry. In fact, “the ministry-related courses listed in any seminary catalogue—homiletics, liturgics, worship, counseling, religious education, and pastoral care—all are based on (local) church presuppositions.”<sup>43</sup>

In essence, “...there are no rogue agents or self-appointed ministers. Every legitimate pastor (and chaplain) has a church standing behind him. Church affirmation is essential to the call to ministry.”<sup>44</sup> The local church is the key institutional environment that helps shape, prepare, and establish the vocational identity of those called into the ministry. It assists in firmly establishing their faith, beliefs, and practices as minister for their respective denomination. This is especially vital for military chaplains who become virtually an extension of their local church within the context of a diverse pluralistic, and predominantly secular institutional environment.

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<sup>41</sup> Galatians 1:12.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Timothy 5:22.

<sup>43</sup> Richard G. Hutcheson, *The Churches and the Chaplaincy*. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 36.

<sup>44</sup> Jason K. Allen, *Discerning Your Call to Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016), 76.

One of the first questions ecclesiastical endorsing agencies ask an ordained pastor who applies for endorsement as a military chaplain regards their providing a detailed account of their initial calling into the ministry, what led them to consider the military chaplaincy, and how their local church helped them discern the call. After a thorough interview process with the denominational endorser, their application packet that appears before a denominational vetting authority (e.g., The Chaplain Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention) must include key ministry experience information, including a reference letter from their pastor, a copy of their ordination certificate, an affirmation letter from their local church verifying their current membership status, and a description of their previous ministry positions (at least two years ministry experience). In other words, “since pastors are under shepherds of God, not just anyone can take up the post. God, in His wisdom, has made the church a natural vetting instrument.”<sup>45</sup>

This is especially essential for pastors who pursue the military chaplaincy. Hopefully, the church affirms the legitimacy of this specialized ministry, has the necessary training in place to prepare pastors for ministry outside the walls of the church into the institutional context of the Armed Services, and develops a pastoral care plan to help them stay connected with their local church. One of the greatest roles churches can play in preparing ministers for the military chaplaincy is by simply making a commitment to pray for the pastor and his family as they leave the church for the mission field of the Armed Services.

### Deployment

Since Jesus Christ first commissioned his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations”<sup>46</sup>, the church has been “under obligation to disperse themselves into every country of the

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<sup>45</sup> Allen, *Discerning Your Call to Ministry*.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 28:19.

habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants, without exception, or limitation.”<sup>47</sup> The Lord further taught his disciples that when they fulfill this important mission to all the nations, “...then the end will come.”<sup>48</sup> The church of Jesus Christ helps to accomplish the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8) every time it sends out and/or supports Christ-followers as they take the hope of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. God has called and deployed the church to be on the constant mission of redeeming people “from every tribe and language and people (group) and nation.”<sup>49</sup>

One of the primary ways that churches fulfill their Great Commission responsibility is through the calling, preparing, commissioning, and deploying of military chaplains into the Armed Services. Some military chaplains have referred to themselves as “mobile missionaries” or “a missionary on steroids”. They represent one of the church’s most effective evangelistic ministries, literally deploying with the Gospel to nations across the earth.

In 1940, The Southern Baptist Convention began discussing ways to recruit pastors as military chaplains “for the difficult but increasingly important work...(to) carry the message of Christ to the boys ...and their families in the various posts and bases of our national defense.”<sup>50</sup> The following year, when the United States was on the verge of a world war, The Southern Baptist Convention established the Chaplain Commission to formally endorse Southern Baptist pastors as military chaplains. The denomination firmly believed there was no greater soul-winning

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<sup>47</sup> William Carey, *“An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians To Use All Means For the Conversion Of the Heathens* (Leicester, England: Ann Ireland, 1792), 7.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew 24:14.

<sup>49</sup> Revelation 5:9.

<sup>50</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: SBC Executive Committee, 1940), [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1940.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1940.pdf), 121.

opportunity at the time than to send military chaplains to military training bases around the country where hundreds of thousands of young men were being sent for military service.

The effectiveness of this decision is evidenced by the fact that, by the end of World War II, SBC military chaplains reported “299,342 professions of faith and 1037 men called into the ministry. The professions of faith were 82% of those reported by Southern Baptist churches from 1941 to 1945.”<sup>51</sup> Dr. Alfred Carpenter, the first executive director of the SBC’s Chaplain Commission, set the stage for the denomination’s view of military chaplains’ and their significant role as deployed evangelists and missionaries from their home church. From his perspective, every military chaplain was a “missionary in uniform, and evangelist at large,”<sup>52</sup> called to take the Gospel where few other missionaries or pastors could go.

One of the most important ministries that needs to take place when a pastor and his family deploy into the military chaplaincy is for their local or “sending” church to conduct a commissioning service in celebration of this life-changing ministry decision. This is extremely essential for several reasons. First, it confirms the church’s recognition of those “sent out” of deploying from their congregation into the mission field of the Armed Services, one of the largest “unreached people groups” in the United States. Second, a commissioning service confers a blessing on those called to the specialized ministry of the military chaplaincy. Third, it publicly commits the sending church’s responsibility to personally affirm and pray for the pastor and family they send into the military chaplaincy.

The real question is, how often do churches formally commission their ministers for the military chaplaincy? How many congregations celebrate the deployment of their clergy into the military chaplaincy as their partial fulfilment of the Great Commission? Regrettably, a number

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<sup>51</sup> Lawrence P. Fitzgerald, *History of the Southern Baptist Chaplaincy* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, 1970), 99.

<sup>52</sup> Fitzgerald, 100.

pastors have experienced rejection or simply a lack of interest from their peers, support group, or denomination in their decision to become a military chaplain simply because of the myth that going into the chaplaincy means “leaving the ministry.”

A retired military chaplain wrote, “I remember, vividly, when I was returning from Vietnam as a United States Army chaplain, a pastor asked me, ‘So, what made you decide to leave ministry to become a chaplain?’ The semi-smirk on his face made his meaning crystal clear: chaplaincy is not real ministry.”<sup>53</sup> Another military chaplain reflected on the frequent reactions he’s personally experienced from pastors and religious leaders about the chaplaincy:

Two common misconceptions go hand-in-hand. The first is the notion that pastors “left the ministry” to serve as chaplains. The second is that chaplains represent all faith groups, kind of like Father Mulcahy in the television show *M\*A\*S\*H*. We haven’t left ministry by any stretch of the imagination. Like any other ordained ministry position, we preach, teach, counsel, baptize, officiate weddings and funerals, and visit people in many settings. We faithfully represent our respective religious organization’s beliefs while operating in a pluralistic environment.<sup>54</sup>

One military chaplain shared with me his painful story of the reaction from his senior pastor had after he told him about his calling into the military chaplaincy. He summarized the conversation, “At first the pastor didn’t say anything to me. After a few moments of silence, he responded almost angrily, ‘I think you’re making a big mistake. If I were writing a biography of your life, I would certainly not include in it a chapter on becoming a military chaplain!’”<sup>55</sup> The chaplain said his pastor never spoke with him again for almost two decades. Needless to say, the chaplain never felt he had the blessing from his church on his entire career as a military chaplain.

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<sup>53</sup> Dick Stenbakken, “I Have Not Left the Ministry!”, *Ministry*, July (2018), <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2018/07/left>.

<sup>54</sup> Chaplain (Colonel) Geoff Bailey, “Military Chaplains On the Frontlines of Faith: A Conversation,” *Baptist Joint Committee For Religious Liberty*, Nov 10, 2020, <https://bjconthehill.medium.com/military-chaplains-on-the-front-lines-of-faith-a-conversation-with-chaplain-colonel-geoff-bailey-5cd3889a5a21>.

<sup>55</sup> Personal conversation with a retired military chaplain (name withheld to protect the privacy of the chaplain), August 28, 2018.

Acts 13:1-3, considered by some as the birth of what some refer to as “international missions”, contains an ideal framework or protocol for deploying chaplains and missionaries into their respective mission fields.

The importance of this narrative is that it describes the first place of planned “overseas missions” carried out by representatives of a particular church, rather than by solitary individuals, and begun by a deliberate church decision, inspired by the Spirit, rather than somewhat more causally as a result of persecution.<sup>56</sup>

One of the church’s key roles is to **recognize** those within their congregation who have a calling to ministry (*leitourgeō*) on their lives. Secondly, churches must prayerfully **respond** to the Holy Spirit’s leading as they “set apart” (*aphorizō*) or appoint those for the work of the ministry. Third, a congregation of believers should **realize** that the Lord, not a committee or spiritual director, determines the specific work (*ergon*) in which God has uniquely called a person. Fourth, the church celebrates and **reaffirms** an individual’s call to ministry through “fasting and prayer” (*nēsteuō* and *proseuchomai*). Finally, the church publicly declares their **responsibility** for and prayerful commitment to the person they deploy to the mission field by their laying on of hands (*epitithēmi*). The deployment phase of a military chaplain’s pilgrimage is a key factor to their personal success and resilience in numerous ministry transitions.

#### Re-entry

Shortly after Jesus taught the Twelve on the cost of discipleship, He appointed and sent seventy others on a short-term mission trip to the various towns and villages that He planned to visit soon (Luke 10:1). When they returned, the seventy joyously reported back to Jesus their miraculous ministry success:

“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name! And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt

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<sup>56</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 214.

you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' ”<sup>57</sup>

Jesus taught them several principles about their ministry re-entry experience. First, the seventy returned with the awareness of a new worldview, one in which the ministry includes battles in the spiritual realm. Second, they gained an understanding that Jesus alone gave them the power and authority for ministry. Third, Jesus exhorted the seventy to remember that their lives were not measured by ministry success but ultimately by their faith in God. Finally, Jesus taught them that rest, relaxation, and retreat should precede re-entry into any new ministry assignment (Mark 6:31). Their lives would never be the same again.

The Apostle Paul experienced the same re-entry principles in his ministry. In Acts 9:15 the Lord commissioned him to carry the message of Jesus Christ to “the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” He and Barnabas would later be called to Jerusalem to explain their cross-cultural ministry to the apostles and elders. It was a turning point for Paul. He would never be able to fully return to his Jewish cultural roots. His eyes had been opened to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the nations. For the rest of his life, all the way to his final ministry at Rome, Paul would remain culturally homeless,” a global nomad.”<sup>58</sup>

Arguably the most difficult season of a military chaplain’s ministry pilgrimage comes when they transition out of the Armed Services and return “home” to the world of civilian ministry. A recently retired military chaplain reflected, “I’ve never felt so lonely since leaving military service.”<sup>59</sup> In many respects, military chaplains transition home as culturally homeless and global nomads, having to manage a sense of “homelessness” often within the context of their own

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<sup>57</sup> Luke 10:17-20.

<sup>58</sup> Norma M. McCaig, “Growing Up With A World View,” *Foreign Service Journal*, Sep 1994, 32-41, accessed on December 21, 2020, <https://9musesnews.com/2013/07/25/growing-up-with-a-world-view-norma-mccaig/>.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a retired military chaplain (name is withheld to protect the privacy of the chaplain), August 27, 2018.

denominational affinity. During military chaplains' tenure on the mission field of the Armed Services, their church home and denomination has changed, the military chaplain has changed and, having fully been immersed in the military culture, they now must readapt to civilian life.

Part of the re-entry challenge for military chaplains stems from the fact that, while serving the military community, they were members or "insiders" of the total institution of the Armed Services. In other words, they lived in the same community as their congregation, shared the same work responsibilities, wore the same uniform, ate the same food, and endured the same training hazards or dangers. "Military chaplains comprise one of the few groups of clergymen—perhaps the only such group—who can minister as "insiders" to a total institution."<sup>60</sup> Once military chaplains separate from the Armed Services, they no longer have a ministry "insider" status within their denomination. In many cases, it is somewhat difficult to find acceptance among their fellow pastors who bear the same denominational credentials.

Another re-entry challenge for military chaplains regards finding a new church ministry or home. Few military chaplains return to their home of record or to their sending church. In many respects, military ministry has been "one continual journey of deep investment and letting go, of rooting and uprooting, of settling down and moving on."<sup>61</sup> A chaplain recently asked me to provide him a pastoral letter for him to pursue a graduate degree program. I immediately advised him to get a letter from the pastor where he held his church membership. He replied, "I've been a member of my church for over twenty-five years. Since then, I've moved to at least twenty times around the world, and my church is on its third pastor since I've been home. He doesn't know me at all."

Lastly, military chaplains have a challenge with re-entry transition mainly because they lack the opportunity to share their ministry story when they come home. They quickly discover that few

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<sup>60</sup> Halverson, 47.

<sup>61</sup> Rupp, 32.

churches seem interested enough or make room in their busy church calendar to hear a military chaplain recount his evangelistic activities in the Armed Services. The Bible considers the opportunity for us to tell our “sacred story” as a holy obligation. The Apostle Paul saw its importance in his own life and as a constant source of encouragement to his churches.

In Acts 20:17-38, as he prepared for yet another mission trip, Paul traveled to Ephesus and gave his beloved church one last ministry update. He summarized his faithful witness of the Gospel, regardless of the context, crowd, or the consequences. He talked about the price he paid “with tears and trials” in being obedient to Jesus Christ. He exhorted the church leaders to love and protect those God placed under their pastoral care. He urged them to faithfully hold on to the Word of God. Then he asked them to pray for him, regardless of the ministry challenges he knew that lay ahead for him in Jerusalem and beyond. Finally, Paul asked them, “(Pray) that ‘I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.’”<sup>62</sup> The response of the Ephesian elders was overwhelming,

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.<sup>63</sup>

I can only imagine the encouragement and prayerful support the Apostle Paul received from his beloved Ephesian elders prior to his hard journey to Jerusalem and Rome. Military chaplains, as well as all missionaries, need similar opportunities with their church and fellow during their re-entry home from the mission field. Otherwise, it will be like the culturally homeless missionary who reflected on their journey back home after years on the mission field:

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<sup>62</sup> Acts 20:24.

<sup>63</sup> Acts 20:36-38.

There was no funeral. No flowers. No ceremony. No one had died. No weeping or wailing. Just in my heart. *I can't...But I did anyway, and nobody knew I couldn't. I don't want to...* But nobody else said they didn't. So I put down my panic and picked up my luggage and got on the plane. There was no funeral.<sup>64</sup>

### Transition: A Theological Framework

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, transition is a three-phased process that people go through as they receive the news of a pending change in their life, internalize it, and eventually accept it as their “new normal.” Successful transitions require the letting go of the familiar ways or identity, entering a “neutral zone...where critical psychological realignments and repatternings take place”<sup>65</sup>, and then coming out of the transition to accept or face a new beginning. Transition “begins with an ending and finishes with a beginning.”<sup>66</sup> I once counseled a woman whose daughter was tragically killed in an automobile accident. Although her daughter had been dead for years, the woman had refused to move or change anything in the house. It was as if her daughter was still physically alive and living in the home. This poor mother was stuck in the “neutral zone”, and it was having a devastating effect on her emotionally and spiritually. It was also impacting her relationship with the other family members.

The first phase of a ministry transition begins with the letting go, losing, or ending of something, such as the previous church, support group, or pastoral identity. For example, the Psalmist revealed his full confidence in the Lord’s Providence as he declared, “My times (or seasons) are in Your hands.”<sup>67</sup> Ruth was decisive in her transition as she courageously gave up her Moabite family, culture, and religion to follow Naomi, her mother-in-law. Mary showed her

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<sup>64</sup> D. C. Polluck and R.E. VanReken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2009), 159.

<sup>65</sup> Bridges, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Bridges.

<sup>67</sup> Psalm 31:15.

willingness for a radical change in her life after being told by an angel of the Lord that would conceive the Son of God by the Holy Spirit. She said in faith, “Let it be to me according to your word.”<sup>68</sup>

Jesus taught His disciples that the litmus test of their discipleship began with their denial of loss of everything to follow Him. Jesus Christ serves as the perfect example in the phase one of transition as He let go of everything to become the Savior of the world, “...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”<sup>69</sup>, letting go of everything, even to the point of His death on a cross.

Phase two of a ministry transition is the “neutral zone.” It’s the gap or empty space between the loss of the old and the beginning of the new. The neutral zone provides you time to reflect the previous ministry experience, which often involves grief or mourning, and to begin the reorientation or redirection towards a new beginning in the future. The unsettledness and “not yet” experience of the neutral zone provides an opportunity for God to provide new insights and understanding on the way ahead.

The Book of Habakkuk provides the picture of a man wrestling with God in the neutral zone. First, he complains to God about the world crisis facing the people of faith, and then prays for the Lord to do something. When God tells him that He is at work and has a plan, Habakkuk doesn’t like the answer. So, he climbs up in his prayer tower and waits until he has a clear picture of the future. The Lord provided Habakkuk great wisdom for Habakkuk and all who seek the Lord’s guidance while in the neutral zone, “Wait for it.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Luke 1:38.

<sup>69</sup> Philippians 2:8.

<sup>70</sup> Habakkuk 2:3.

The final phase of ministry transition focuses on the beginning of something new. This only occurs after people have “come through the wilderness and are ready to make the emotional (and spiritual) commitment to do things the new way and see themselves as new people with new understandings, new values, new attitudes, and –most of all—new identities.”<sup>71</sup> Abraham began his new journey after God called him to a new land, people, and future. Moses and the people of Israel started a new beginning after they left Egypt. David began his new life after confronting and killing Goliath. The first disciples transitioned to a new profession after they left their fishing nets and followed Jesus.

Transitions for military chaplains in Phase three requires them to embrace a new reality in the civilian culture, to accept their new identity as a civilian pastor, to develop confidence in a new ministry environment, to build new relationships, and to trust God’s plan for their lives beyond military service. The Bible reminds us, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Bridges, 66.

<sup>72</sup> Jeremiah 29:11.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1997 was, in retrospect, a significant life event for me and my family. I was within a year of completing twenty years of active Federal Service as a commissioned Army officer and chaplain, making me eligible for full military retirement. At the same time, a local church had asked that I pray about becoming their next senior pastor. Struggling with this ministry decision, I sought out a wise and godly pastor for his advice and prayers. He responded, almost without hesitation, “Chaplain, it’s not over until God says it’s over!” I made a carefully thought-out vow that day that I would remain in the military chaplaincy until the Lord clearly revealed to me that it was time to transition out of this specialized ministry back into civilian life. The very next day, the Army Chief of Chaplains called me into his office and gave me my next ministry assignment, one that eventually led to my becoming the 22<sup>nd</sup> Army Chief of Chaplains ten years later. This story serves as a great reminder that any transition in ministry should always be approached with prayerful discernment and with the confident belief in God’s perfect timing.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature available that assists military chaplains in their strategic, and inevitable, transition from the Armed Services back into the civilian environment. Very few resources currently address this specific problem faced by military chaplains. However, a large number of publications regarding military to civilian transition shed light on this critical ministry event. The literature discovered focuses on three important areas of

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 1:6.

consideration to ensure a successful transition from the military chaplaincy back to civilian ministry: post-military transition, post military ministry transition, and the challenge of re-entry.

### **“Thank You For Your Service!”- Post-Military Transition**

The day eventually comes for all military service members when they must prepare to transition out of the Armed Services. That moment in time could occur for a number of reasons, including voluntary separation (end of one’s term of service), involuntary separation (e.g., failure of selection for promotion, chaplains’ loss of endorsement, physical fitness failure, or reduction in force), mandatory retirement age, or medical retirement. Regardless of the type of separation from the Armed Services, all military members are required to attend the Department of Defense (DoD) Transition Program (TAP), “an outcome-based program that bolsters opportunities, services, and training for transitioning Service members in their preparation to meet their post-military goals.”<sup>2</sup>

Studies reveal that “both pre-retirement planning and the transferability of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) influence the relative satisfaction and adjustment of military retirees”<sup>3</sup> back to civilian life. DoD recommends that military members should begin their transition process at least two years prior to separation or retirement from service and no later than 365 days prior to separation. The following summarizes the TAP timeline<sup>4</sup>:

#### **Two Years Prior To Transition**

- Make fundamental life decisions and consider retirement locations
- Confirm when your military service obligation ends
- Review the Pre-separation Checklist with your TAP counselor
- Identify service providers who will assist you in your transition

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<sup>2</sup> US Department of Defense, *DOD Transition Assistance Program*, accessed February 28, 2021, <https://www.dodtap.mil>.

<sup>3</sup> Peter E. Spiegel and Kenneth S. Schultz, “The Influence of Preretirement Planning and Transferability of Skills on Naval Officers’ Retirement Satisfaction and Adjustment,” *Military Psychology* 15, no. 4 (2003): 285-307.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of the Army, *US Army Retirement Planning Guide 2020*, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://soldierforlife.army.mil/Documents/2020%20US%20Army%20Retirement%20Planning%20Guide.pdf>.

### **24-12 Months Prior To Transition**

- Attend retirement planning briefings
- Attend TAP employment workshop
- Evaluate family requirements (education, health care, employment, etc.)
- Develop your individual transition plan with action dates

### **12 Months Prior To Transition**

- Begin researching the job market and develop a resume
- Accumulate a wardrobe for post-military employment
- Apply to colleges if you or family members will attend after military service
- Schedule your retirement physical as close to 6-month mark as possible
- Update wills and powers of attorney
- Schedule your retirement ceremony

Unfortunately, with the exception of standard transition support and other post-military resources provided by DoD to all separating military members, military chaplains in transition must fend for themselves to find ministry opportunities beyond the Armed Services. TAP doesn't offer them ministry preference workshops, job fairs, or specific professional assistance like that afforded to other service members transitioning to broad civilian career fields. In fact, military chaplains who hope to return to some type of civilian ministry usually develop their own post-military employment goals by seeking advisement and ministry opportunities from their denominational endorser, local church, social network, or professional ministry organizations.

*Mission Transition: Navigating the Opportunities and Obstacles To Your Post-Military Career* is a comprehensive “how-to” planning guide that assists military members in successfully navigating their way beyond military life back into a civilian environment. Having researched veterans’ post-military transition process for over twenty years, the author’s primary purpose for writing the book is to “help veterans realize their full potential by avoiding false starts and suboptimal career choices following separation from the military.”<sup>5</sup> The book provides a detailed,

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew J. Louis, *Mission Transition: Navigating the Opportunities and Obstacles To Your Post-Military Career* (Nashville: HarperCollins Leadership, 2019), 11.

five-step transition process to assist veterans in finding “productive roles in fulfilling careers as soon as they can upon leaving the service.”<sup>6</sup>

*Mission Transition* states that the first and most important step in transition success from military to civilian life is to “understand who you are and who you want to be.”<sup>7</sup> Richard Nelson Bolles, in his classic book first published in 1970, *What Color is Your Parachute?*, emphasized the importance of taking a self-inventory of one’s passion, strengths, and career goals when in a season of employment transition. He said that “knowing who you are, what you like to do best, what kindles your brain, and what enables you to do your best work”<sup>8</sup> will result in success and job satisfaction 84 percent of the time.

The main reason self-identity awareness is so important for veterans is because they have spent a period of their lives in the “total institutional” setting of the Armed Services. Sociologist Erving Goffman writes that “total institutions are distinguished from other institutions in society by the fact that they control, to a considerable extent, the total lives of the persons involved.”<sup>9</sup>

Military service encompasses every aspect in the lives of those in uniform, including their family members. Fences around military bases, entry control access points, sentry guards, and Common Access Cards (CAC), and Military ID cards are but a few of the factors that reinforce the vast differences between military members and the outside world. Therefore, military members can expect some degree of an identity crisis upon separation from the Armed Services.

This is especially true for military chaplains. They “comprise one of the few groups of clergymen—perhaps the only such group—who can minister as ‘insiders’ to a total institution.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Louis, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Louis, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Richard N. Bolles, *What Color Is Your Parachute? 2020* (New York: TenSpeed Press, 2019), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., *The Churches and the Chaplaincy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 41.

<sup>10</sup>Hutcheson, *The Churches and the Chaplaincy*, 47.

For example, they live in the same community as their parishioners, share the same professional hardships with their troops, engage the unchurched on a regular basis, and have the opportunity to be a prophetic voice to a secular institution. Their unique ministry environment is mobile, multi-ethnic, ecumenical, and non-building centered in support of one of the largest and unreached “people groups” in the United States, most of whom are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four.

Finally, the military chaplaincy is unique over other commissioned officer career fields in the sense that it is “a profession which deliberately makes role conflict between the expectations of their clergy role and military role a way of life.”<sup>11</sup> The majority of military chaplains successfully maintain their pastoral identity throughout their military career. However, some struggle with the duality of the clergy-military tension, especially if they had little pastoral experience prior to entering the military chaplaincy. One young military chaplain, after serving only a few months on active duty, wisely expressed his understanding of the clergy-military balancing act:

My parish is part of the American war machine. I can minister to these people only by keeping that awareness ever before me. That I can live with. Should the war machine become a part of me, then I am doomed. The scriptural challenge to be "in the world but not of the world" confronts me momentarily when I don the uniform, when I salute, when I accept my paycheck. It confronts me when I pray and when I counsel. It is an unsolvable tension. It is a tension which only by its absence condemns me.<sup>12</sup>

Military chaplains wear many hats. Besides their primary role as a religious leader and commissioned officer, they wear a third hat in the development of their respective command’s

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<sup>11</sup> Hutcheson, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Robert C. Vickers, *The Military Chaplaincy: A Study In Role Conflict* (Doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1984), accessed on February 20, 2021, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a144340.pdf>, 12, DTIC (AD- A144340).

moral and ethical program, assessing unit morale and serving as a nonthreatening resource to whom service members can turn when they need advice, are in trouble, or have emergencies.”<sup>13</sup>

As military chaplains conclude their ministry responsibilities in the Armed Forces and prepare for transition to civilian life, they must seriously consider how their life experiences within a total institutional setting has impacted their prospective for future vocational ministry in a context of the traditional civilian ministry setting. Having lived for years under the tension of institutional duality and multiple pastoral leadership roles, often performed in dangerous training conditions or combat environments, how does that translate back to the typical church environment that has little or no experience in managing diversity, pluralism, and cultural world view issues?

Os Guinness in his book, *Impossible People*, argues that Christians today must desperately look for new ways to engage society’s growing secular and pluralistic worldviews,

The simple but unavoidable point has still not sunk in for most people: one of the major problems in the modern world is how we are to live with our deepest differences when those differences are religious and ideological, and especially when those differences erupt in public life. Living (together) with our deepest differences is a matter of the right and just ordering of our societies, and at the highest level of all, the issue is how to ensure the maximum freedom for people of all faiths.<sup>14</sup>

Military chaplains return home to civilian ministry with an almost utopian perspective of society, having served as religious liberty advocates for their military members, engaging in religious and spiritual dialogue with others without compromising their own faith, beliefs, and practices. In fact, Christian chaplains develop unique evangelistic approaches that appeal to a pluralistic community, having literally become “...all things to all people, that by all means (they) might save some”<sup>15</sup> in the Armed Forces with the hope of the good news of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> James E. Parco and David E. Levy, “*Attitudes Aren’t Free: Thinking Deeply About Diversity in the US Armed Forces*” (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2010), 107.

<sup>14</sup> Os Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle For the Soul of Civilization*, (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2016), 162.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22.

Additionally, military chaplains come back home to their religious communities with a deeper sense of compassion, having witnessed on countless times the crowds of service members, American citizens, foreign nationals, or enemy combatants who were "...harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."<sup>16</sup> In many cases, they return home broken and wounded themselves, having suffered post-traumatic stress or compassion fatigue while ministering to the wounded, dying, and survivors during the chaos and carnage of war.

Many military chaplains transition back to the civilian ministry with a renewed passion to proclaim the Gospel and a sober-minded call to ministry tempered in the furnace of crisis counseling, next of kin death notifications, and pastoral care in a combat environment. As they return to their civilian churches, they can quickly become disillusioned or cynical with congregations embroiled in petty fights over the style of worship music or the color of carpet in the sanctuary. In some cases, they lose interest in or leave the ministry entirely.

In many respects, military chaplains, like all veterans returning homes, have forgotten who they are or what they want to do next in their lives beyond the military. *Mission Transition* recommends that veterans take one or two personality tests or assessments during their transition process, such as CareerLeader,<sup>17</sup> Myers-Briggs Career Test<sup>18</sup>, or Engage Your Strengths<sup>19</sup> to help them identify what type of career fields best match their personality type. Military chaplains will

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 9:36.

<sup>17</sup> James Waldrop and Timothy Butler, *CareerLeader*, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.careerleader.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> Katharine C. Briggs, "Myers-Briggs Career Test Online." *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. (Palo Alto CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1987), accessed March 1, 2021, <https://discoveryourpersonality.com/myers-briggs-career-report-1.html>.

<sup>19</sup> "Engage Your Strengths Test," *American Strengths Center*, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.engageyourstrengths.com/quiz/>.

find these personality assessments helpful in the rediscovery of the passion and satisfaction from their initial calling into the ministry and the chaplaincy.

Psychologist Abraham Maslov, in his classic 1943 paper, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, said that we only find discontent and restlessness when we fail to exercise our human potential and put our God-given strengths to full use: “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization.<sup>20</sup> A military chaplain’s transition back to civilian life should lead them to a time of self-reflection regarding who they are and who they’ve been called to be: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”<sup>21</sup>

The second step *Mission Transition* recommends to military members in transition to civilian life is the development of a personal brand, or “elevator speech”, that clearly and succinctly reveals your professional passion to a potential employer. A personal brand is “the unique combination of skills and experiences that make you who you are. It is how you present yourself to the world.”<sup>22</sup> It takes into consideration one’s leadership role preferences, career goals, geographical locations, and life factors, summarizing them in one or two clear and concise statements. The DoD TAP Course requires all veterans in transition to develop a personal brand that, in many respects, is the foundation for building their work objective statement and resume.

Military chaplains in transition can greatly benefit from developing their personal brand or life mission statement. It can serve as a clear azimuth for their ministry back within a civilian context. As Douglas Groothuis writes in his book, *Truth Decay*:

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<sup>20</sup> A. H. Maslov, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4, (1943): 382, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.318.2317&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Timothy 1:6.

<sup>22</sup> Caroline Carillon, “Why Personal Branding Is More Important Than Ever,” *Forbes*, February 12, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2019/02/12/why-personal-branding-is-more-important-than-ever/?sh=2dfdcca62408>.

In this toxic cultural environment, the Christian needs to know who they are and who they serve. They should be crystal clear on what they are summoned to know, who they are summoned to be, and what they are summoned to do before the face of God. As postmodernists vainly pose and preen for effect, experience and power, Christians can and must lodge their identities firmly in the transcendent reality of the triune God.<sup>23</sup>

Right On Mission, a ministry development platform that assists Christians in writing their life mission statement, has one goal: “to teach believers to think so Christianly that they find the moral courage to act with integrity as Christ followers, even in the face of opposition.”<sup>24</sup> A life mission statement “reveals your sacred passion. It puts words to who you are. It is more than a personal brand. It articulates your individual uniqueness.”<sup>25</sup> Military chaplains in transition will find that the development or re-discovery of their life mission statement will provide them a tangible reminder of God’s direction and unique calling on their lives: Author and pastor John Piper, in his book *Don’t Waste Your Life*, writes:

What is the one passion of your life that makes everything else look like rubbish in compassion? Oh, that God would help me waken in you a single passion for a single great reality that would unleash you, and set you free from small dreams, and send you, for the glory of Christ, into all the spheres of secular life and to all the peoples of the earth.<sup>26</sup>

The third step that *Mission Transition* recommends for military members during their transition process to civilian life is to document their network of friends, acquaintances, and business contacts they have developed during their military career. A growing number of studies reveal that networking, especially through the use of social media resources such as LinkedIn or veteran transition organizations, is one of the key factors that ensures a successful transition into the civilian work environment.

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<sup>23</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2000), 277.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Sumner, *Right On Mission*, accessed January 26, 2021, <https://www.rightonmission.org/>.

<sup>25</sup> Right On Mission.

<sup>26</sup> John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 48.

A definitive job search study by Stanford sociologist Mark Granovetter discovered that “58 percent of those surveyed found employment (primarily) through personal contacts”<sup>27</sup> in their network. The percentage appears to be even higher during times of economic uncertainty or social upheaval. In his book, *Never Eat Alone*, Keith Ferrazzi pointed out the importance of networking, especially when going through seasons of transition, “If you need a job, money, advice, help, hope..., there’s only one surefire fail-safe place to find them—within your extended circle of friends and associates.”<sup>28</sup> Sean Everton, professor at the Naval Postgraduate School and a specialist in the use of social network analysis, believes that “people with strong (religious) ties are happier and even healthier, because in such networks members provide one another with strong emotional and material support in times of grief or trouble and someone with whom to share life’s joys and triumphs.”<sup>29</sup>

Military chaplains have an advantage over the majority of veterans transitioning to civilian life primarily because they normally return to the same career field after separation from the Armed Services. Additionally, as a result of their previous ministry experience, they already have a strong network in place prior to entering the military chaplaincy, including contacts from their local church, the denominational endorser, faith group references, seminary networking websites, ministerial associations, and community relationships.

Most denominations that endorse military chaplains have processes in place to maintain a personal and continuous relationship with their chaplains. For example, the Southern Baptist

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<sup>27</sup> Mark Granovetter, *Getting A Job: A Study of Contacts and Careers* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 33.

<sup>28</sup> John Maxwell, “It’s the Network”, The John Maxwell Company, June 11, 2011, accessed February 21, 2021, <https://www.johnmaxwell.com/blog/its-the-network/>.

<sup>29</sup> Sean F. Everton, “Networks and Religion: Ties that Bind, Loose, Build Up, and Tear Down,” *Journal of Social Structure* 16, no. 1 (August 13, 2019): 9, [https://www.exeley.com/journal\\_of\\_social\\_structure/pdf/10.21307/joss-2019-020](https://www.exeley.com/journal_of_social_structure/pdf/10.21307/joss-2019-020).

Convention maintains regular contact with their endorsed military chaplains through phone calls, emails, social media, quarterly webinars and newsletters, and periodic site visits to military chaplains' duty stations. Additionally, they have a full-time Chaplain Pastoral Care Manager on staff who, assisted by regional chaplain ambassadors, "...provides direct pastoral care to chaplains and families, helps refer those in need to applicable pastoral care resources, processes requests for financial assistance for intensive counseling retreats, and provides training on ministry, personal and self-care, and other topics to enhance the ministry skills of chaplains."<sup>30</sup>

Endorsed military chaplains, in turn, have a responsibility to maintain connectivity and regular communication with their respective endorser. The SBC Chaplaincy Endorser requires their military chaplains to maintain regular contact with them through a quarterly ministry report, maintenance of their personal chaplain portal on the denominational website, and annual attendance at the annual Southern Baptist Professional Development Training for "developing their chaplaincy skills and networking"<sup>31</sup> opportunities with their fellow SBC chaplains.

Perhaps the greatest reason that military chaplains should document and maintain a strong social network, especially with their denominational community, is that it supports their subjective well-being while they experience a temporary loss of ministry identity transitioning from military ministry back to a civilian environment. One study found that there is a direct correlation between a strong faith group network and life satisfaction. "Congregational social networks may serve as the 'plausibility structure' for a religious community and thus reinforce the sense of belonging."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> North American Mission Board, *The Southern Baptist Endorsement Manual for Chaplains: Policies, Guidelines, and Practices for Chaplains* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2021), [https://www.namb.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SBC\\_Chaplaincy-Endorsement-Manual.pdf](https://www.namb.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SBC_Chaplaincy-Endorsement-Manual.pdf), 43.

<sup>31</sup> *The Southern Baptist Endorsement Manual*, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Chaeyoon Lim and Robert D. Putnam, "Religion, Social Networks, and Life Satisfaction," *American Sociological Review* 75 (2010), 928, [https://wcfia.harvard.edu/files/wcfia/files/rputnam\\_religion\\_social\\_networks.pdf](https://wcfia.harvard.edu/files/wcfia/files/rputnam_religion_social_networks.pdf).

One example regarding the power of a strong congregational network and life satisfaction comes from the biblical story of Barnabas introducing Paul to the apostles in Jerusalem. Paul had previously attempted to join the disciples but “they were all afraid of him”<sup>33</sup> because he had formerly approved of the stoning of Stephen and persecuted the church prior to his conversion. However, as a result of networking with his new friend, Barnabas, the apostles accepted him into their fellowship.

### **“Homeward Bound”- Post-Military Chaplaincy Transition**

In 2007 the BYU School of Music produced a moving video tribute<sup>34</sup> to recognize members of the United States Armed Forces who had deployed abroad for service in the Global War on Terrorism on or after the national tragedy of September 11, 2001. A beautiful song, “Homeward Bound,” served as the video’s soundtrack. The composer, Marta Keen, said, “I wrote this song for a loved one who was embarking upon a new phase of life's journey, to express the soul's yearning to grow and change.”<sup>35</sup> The chorus of the song includes a continual plea, “Set me free to find my calling and I'll return to you somehow.”<sup>36</sup> In many respects, that describes the relationship military chaplains have with their churches who sent them out as missionaries into the Armed Services for a period of time. The challenge for military chaplains occurs when they eventually transition back home to civilian life. Many of them, like foreign missionaries, return home with little or no fanfare.

*Moving On---Moving Forward: A Guide For Pastors In Transition* is a comprehensive resource and helpful “travel guide” for pastors to navigate the maze of transitions at different

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<sup>33</sup> Acts 9:26.

<sup>34</sup> BYU School of Music, “Until Then,” June 9, 2007, Video, 4:03, accessed February 20, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9m06QFxb3o>.

<sup>35</sup> Wind Repertory Project, “Homeward Bound,” accessed March 1, 2021, [https://www.windrep.org/Homeward\\_Bound\\_Keen](https://www.windrep.org/Homeward_Bound_Keen).

<sup>36</sup> Marta Keen, “Homeward Bound,” 1991, <https://genius.com/Marta-keen-homeward-bound-lyrics>.

phases in their ministry journey. The authors wrote the book after surveying and interviewing over two hundred pastors from various denominations who experienced their transition “journey and lived to talk about it.”<sup>37</sup> The book reinforces the fact that transitions in ministry are normal, and frequent. According to a 2009 Barna Group report, “one of the enduring idiosyncrasies of mainline churches is the brief tenure of pastors in a church. On average, these pastors last four years before moving to another congregation.”<sup>38</sup> One could easily conclude that “every pastor is an interim pastor.”<sup>39</sup> That same truth applies to military chaplains as well. Since every military chaplain is an interim chaplain, they should approach their eventual transition from the Armed Services to civilian life with an intentional transition plan in mind.

The authors of *Moving On---Moving Forward* recommend that pastors in transition initially spend time assessing the essential ministry tools they have developed up to this point which, in turn, will serve as a solid foundation in their next pastoral assignment. These resources include a clear sense of their “personal call to ministry, core values, life mission, spiritual giftedness, leadership competencies, ministry experiences, and educational preparation.”<sup>40</sup> During this self-assessment exercise, some pastors may discover ministry areas that need improvement or require additional professional development training.

Others who may have experienced failure, rejection, or disappointment in their previous ministry may use this as an opportunity to seek out pastoral care for themselves or their family.

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<sup>37</sup> Michael J. Anthony and Mick Boersma, *Moving On---Moving Forward: A Guide For Pastors In Transition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 16.

<sup>38</sup> The Barna Group, “Report Examines the State of Mainline Churches,” *Barna Research: Leaders and Pastors*, December 2009, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/report-examines-the-state-of-mainline-protestant-churches/#.VgVcoaKNA-c>.

<sup>39</sup> William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020), 19.

<sup>40</sup> Anthony and Boersma, 60.

According to The Pulpit and Pew Project, a multi-year research project on the current state of pastoral leadership undertaken by Duke University Divinity School, 68% of the pastors surveyed left their previous ministry position due to burnout, family needs, conflict with ministry staff or church members, doctrinal issues, marital difficulties, or lack of denominational support.”<sup>41</sup>

The authors of *Moving On---Moving Forward* challenge pastors to use transitions as a time to reexamine their calling to the ministry, including answering perhaps one of the most important questions, “Under what circumstances do you believe God has called you into vocational ministry?”<sup>42</sup> This is especially important for military chaplains who have spent years in a specialized ministry setting. From my personal experience as a retired US Army chaplain and having interviewed other chaplains who separated from the Armed Services, military chaplains also struggle with two primary issues during their transition back to civilian life.

First, *under what conditions would they consider going back to ministry leadership in the local church?* According to the previously mentioned Pulpit and Pew Project, three main themes surface for ex-pastors when considering a return to the pastorate. One, “the new position would need to be part-time, not full-time.”<sup>43</sup> They no longer wanted the responsibility, and headache, of being a full-time pastor. Military chaplains have a tendency to feel the same way, having spent years serving in the specialized ministry of the chaplaincy.

Second, they would accept a pastoral leadership position if it was “free from the obligations and constraint of denominations.”<sup>44</sup> Military chaplains, having faithfully represented their faith group in the multi-faith and ecumenical environment of the Armed Services, seldom have any

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<sup>41</sup> Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 36.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony and Boersma, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony and Boersma, 193.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony and Boersma, 194.

interest in returning to the latest denominational squabble or controversy. In fact, they may have concluded that an immersion in denominational affairs or politics “actually impedes rather than helps ministry”<sup>45</sup> efforts.

Third, and maybe because of the previous point, many ex-pastors considering a return to the pastorate have “a strong desire to re-enter ministry in a different denomination.”<sup>46</sup> This last point is a critical reminder regarding the importance of military chaplains remaining connected to their denominational endorser throughout their military ministry.

The second issue military chaplains often struggle with during their preparation to resume civilian ministry upon separating from the Armed Services is the question, “*When do I retire from the ministry?*” Currently, the average age of US military chaplains is 45, about ten years higher than that of other commissioned officers.<sup>47</sup> According to military chaplain recruiters, a person must be “at least 21 years of age and not older than 42 by the date they commission into the military.”<sup>48</sup> The “mandatory retirement age for commissioned officers, other than generals or flag officers, is age 62.”<sup>49</sup> Most military chaplains retire in their mid to late 50s, a few years short of their eligibility for Social Security.

The burning question remains, *Is retirement from the ministry biblical?* There is very little Scriptural evidence to establish a theology of retirement. In the Book of Numbers Moses specified

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<sup>45</sup> Anthony and Boersma.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony and Boersma, 196.

<sup>47</sup> Kim Parker, Anthony Cilluffo, and Rene Stevler, “*Six Facts About the US Military and Its Changing Demographics*,” Pew Research Center, April 13, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/>.

<sup>48</sup> US Department of the Army Recruiting Command, Army Chaplain Corps, <https://www.goarmy.com/chaplain/become-an-army-chaplain/requirements.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Cornell Law School, *U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 1251*, Legal Information Institute, accessed March 22, 2021, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/1251>.

an age limit for the Levitical priesthood, “And from the age of fifty years they shall withdraw from the duty of the service and serve no more. They minister to their brothers in the tent of meeting by keeping guard, but they shall do no service.”<sup>50</sup>

According to the Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, this law was not intended to establish a universal retirement. Rather, its purpose was to exempt older priests at a particular age from the tedious manual labor required in “the taking down and setting up of the tabernacle and cleaning it, carrying wood and water for the sacrificial worship, slaying the animals for the daily and festal sacrifices of the congregation, etc.<sup>51</sup> However, their work wasn’t over. After retiring from the daily manual labor in support of the Temple, the Levites were now to “redirect” their ministry to mentor, coach, advise, and provide quality control to the younger Levites charged with the responsibility of maintaining the holy ministry standards in the tent of meeting.

The majority of Judeo-Christian religions have no prescribed retirement date for their religious leaders. Jewish scholars continue to debate the Numbers 8:25-26 passage. They believe the “mandatory retirement age for Levites applied only in the desert, where heavy physical labor was involved; in the Temple in Jerusalem, where the Levites’ main jobs were to sing in the choir and guard the gates, they could continue to serve until they lost their voices.”<sup>52</sup> Although most rabbis today retire around age 70, they have chosen to rely on “a subjective standard rather than an arbitrary age limit, that is, ‘until (the rabbi) trembles’, ‘his hands and feet shake for lack of strength’, or he is no longer competent”<sup>53</sup> to perform his duties. The Roman Catholic Church

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<sup>50</sup> Numbers 8:25-26.

<sup>51</sup> Keil and Delitzsch Old Testament Commentary, Numbers 8, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/kdo/numbers-8.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson and Deborah Silver, eds., *Walking With Life* (Bel Air, CA: Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, 2009), 94, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.aju.edu/sites/default/files/sites/default/default/docs/Walking%20With%20God/Walking%20With%20Life/12%20-%20WwLIFE%20Ageing%20and%20Retirement%20%5Bunit11%5D.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Artson and Silver, *Walking With Life*.

expects priests to remain active in a diocesan assignment at least until the age of 75. According to one source, “the expectation is that the priest will continue to be of service throughout his life until he is physically or cognitively unable to serve. To do otherwise may be perceived as self-indulgent or selfish.”<sup>54</sup>

Southern Baptists have no established retirement age for their pastors. For example, Dr. Charles Stanley retired in 2020 after serving fifty years as the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Reflecting on his retirement, Dr. Stanley remarked,

I don’t believe in retirement. I’ll continue to preach the Gospel as long as God allows. My goal remains the same---to get the truth of the Gospel to as many people as possible as quickly as possible in the power of the Holy Spirit to the Glory of God. I just want to be used to the maximum of my potential through the last day of my life.<sup>55</sup>

Military chaplains should use their retirement or transition from the Armed Services as an opportunity to renew the original passion of their calling to the ministry to “proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.”<sup>56</sup> They should realize that it is “not an ending or withdrawal but potentially the most important and rewarding time of life and an opportunity to use all of their life experiences to enrich the lives of others.”<sup>57</sup> This reminds me of the simple and heartfelt prayer request a military chaplain sent me as he prepared to transition back to civilian ministry, “Pray that I transition to the best use of the rest of my life.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Michael N. Kane, “The Taboo of Retirement for Diocesan Catholic Priests,” *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2016, Jun: 70(2):123-7.

<sup>55</sup> Scott Barkley, “Charles Stanley Stepping down After 50 Years As Pastor,” *Christian Index*, September 13, 2020, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://christianindex.org/stanley-pastor-emeritus-first-baptist-atlanta/>.

<sup>56</sup> Mark 16:15.

<sup>57</sup> Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, “Clergy Retirement and Wholeness: Looking Forward To the Third Age,” *Alban Institute* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005), vii.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with a retired military chaplain (name is withheld to protect the privacy of the chaplain), August 28, 2018.

*Moving On---Moving Forward* highly recommends that pastors develop an exit strategy prior to or during their transition process. An exit strategy is “a series of well-defined preplanned steps and options to follow if you are unexpectedly terminated or voluntarily resign.”<sup>59</sup> This essential transition planning tool ensures the proper closure for pastors and their families prior to their departure from a particular ministry setting. Regardless of the reason, ministry transition has a measure of grief associated with it due to the temporary loss of identity, purpose, stability, relationships, and community. As a result, pastors often have a tendency to react in one of several ways to avoid this significant emotional event: depart quickly with no exit strategy, leave angry or bitter, deny the emotional pain inflicted by the departure, or fully embrace and even celebrate the ministry environment before seeing it in your “rear view mirror.”

Military chaplains have somewhat of an advantage over pastors regarding an exit strategy prior to transitioning back to civilian life. First, like all veterans, they receive an extensive out-processing checklist of personal items they must complete before separating from the military, including a medical exam, post-military financial planning, insurance and health care options, relocation decisions, moving expenses, and family needs, etc.).

Second, they receive a close out performance report and a transition award from their supervisory chain of command. Third, they attend numerous farewell events, including a formal retirement ceremony where they are officially honored for their service to the Nation. Having completed the military’s mandatory out-processing requirements, military chaplains often fail to complete an important step- develop an intentional ministry exit strategy. One study focusing on ministerial transition dynamics found out the following regarding military chaplains:

- 1) Chaplains generally lack skill in knowing how to deal with transition grief.
- 2) Refusal to deal with grief involves a tragic disregard for the emotional needs of their military unit, chapel staff, family, and friends, resulting in feelings of abandonment, betrayal, frustration, and artificiality.

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<sup>59</sup> Anthony and Boersma, 100.

- 3) When chaplains are willing to share their feelings regarding their transition, they experience a sense of freedom, completeness, and closure.
- 4) Supervisory chaplains who conduct an office call with a chaplain in transition provides the opportunity for the departing chaplain to express their issues or emotions involving their departure, encourages them to develop an exit strategy, and allows the supervisory chaplain to formally thank them for their chaplaincy ministry.<sup>60</sup>

### **“Who Moved My Church?” Re-entry Transition**

The Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms “supplements the standard English language dictionaries and standardizes over 25,000 military and associated terminology within DoD and other US Government departments and agencies.”<sup>61</sup> One of the terms missing from this unique dictionary is “re-entry transition.” In fact, the only reference to re-entry within the US Government refers primarily to the support provided to veterans returning to civilian life after incarceration.

The research for this project reveals that most re-entry transition literature focuses on those experienced by missionaries and military members. Re-entry transition is “the process of returning to your home culture from another culture abroad which may involve changes in a person’s physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, social, and spiritual domain.”<sup>62</sup> It assumes “the return to something that is familiar, something you left and desire to return to”<sup>63</sup>, such as home, family, friends, and community. But re-entry transition is more complicated and difficult than that.

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<sup>60</sup> Roy M. Oswald, *Running Through the Thistles: Terminating A Ministerial Relationship With A Parish* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 6.

<sup>61</sup> US Department of Defense, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Office of The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 2021), accessed Mach 2, 2021, <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> Susan Selby, *Back Home: Distress In Re-entering Cross-Cultural Missionary Workers and the Development of a Theoretical Framework For Clinical Management*, PhD diss., University of Adelaide, Australia, 2011, 251, <https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2440/71231/9/01front.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> Marion Knell, *Burn-Up or Splash Down* (Tyrone, GA: Authentic Publishing, 2006), 8.

“Dealing with the readjustment back home, now commonly known as reverse culture shock, appears to be a greater challenge than adjusting to an overseas assignment.”<sup>64</sup>

Military veterans, for example, assume that when they transition out of the Armed Services and return home that they can pick right back up with personal relationships where they left off, or their old neighborhood will be the same, or their friends and family will show interest in their long military journey, or they won’t miss their “battle buddies”, or the regimented lifestyle of a military environment. *Chaplain Turner’s War* describes the struggle one military chaplain had with his own re-entry transition,

Chaplain Turner recognized the great need his soldiers would have when they settled back into life at home after witnessing the horrors of combat, after losing so many friends. He knew they would come home with hidden wounds such as PTSD or traumatic brain injury... and that the ghosts of Iraq would haunt them--- maybe for the rest of their lives. What he did not know was that he would not be immune.<sup>65</sup>

Chaplain Turner later reflected, “The Army had become, in some sense, my identity---dare I say, my mistress. It became something I slowly began to love, maybe even more than my family.”<sup>66</sup>

*The Art of Coming Home* by Craig Storti is one of the most helpful resources for families, employers, or churches to fully understand the challenges of re-entry transition and provide support to those hoping to successfully navigate through it. Storti initially provides a number of common issues faced by those in re-entry transition. He then discusses the various stages of a typical re-entry experience and how returnees should respond to each of them. After a brief discussion of how re-entry transition affects family members and the returnee’s former work or employer, Storti

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<sup>64</sup> Craig Storti, *The Art of Coming Home*, reprint ed. (Boston, MA: Intercultural Press, 2003), xiv.

<sup>65</sup> Moni Basu, *Chaplain Turner’s War* (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 2008), 56.

<sup>66</sup> Adelle M. Banks, “Real-life Chaplain Behind ‘Indivisible’ Movie On Confronting War in Field, At Home” *Religion News Service*, October 25, 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/10/25/real-life-chaplain-behind-indivisible-movie-on-confronting-war-in-field-at-home/>.

examines the impact of re-entry transition on a number of special populations, including military members and missionaries.

According to *The Art of Coming Home*, those experiencing re-entry transition struggle with how familiar people, places, and routines of “home” have changed in their absence,

“...home is the place where you are known and trusted and where you know and trust others; where you are accepted, understood, indulged, and forgiven; a place of rituals and...entirely predictable events and people, and of very few surprises; the place where you belong and feel safe and secure and where you can accordingly trust your instincts, relax, and be yourself. It is, in short, the place where you feel at home.<sup>67</sup>”

This is a perfect description of the local church which should always exhibit a spirit of welcome, and acceptance, especially regarding their members sent out on a mission assignment.

Military chaplains during re-entry transition have often commented that their church home felt very cold and uninviting upon their return from military service. The question is, how has the military chaplain changed and how long have they been away from their home church? The church, in turn, should assess how they support their members called onto the mission field as well as how they welcome them back home. In short, this issue of “home” is a shared responsibility between the military chaplain and their church. Additionally, there needs to be “a cooperative relationship between the church, (the denominational chaplain endorser), and the missions agency”<sup>68</sup> regarding ministry support for the military chaplaincy.

*The Art of Coming Home* states that another big issue during re-entry transition is “how little interest the people back home show in their experiences, including closer relatives and friends.”<sup>69</sup> One veteran told me that he was in the process of finally telling a close friend about a combat

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<sup>67</sup> Storti, 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> Neal Pirolo, *The Reentry Team: Caring For Your Returning Missionaries* (San Diego, CA: Emmaeus Road International, 2000), 12.

<sup>69</sup> Storti, 20.

experience he barely survived in Iraq. About that time, his friend received a text message and asked if he could quickly respond to it. The veteran said that was the last time he would ever tell anyone about his combat experiences. A 2008 study of military veterans revealed that many veterans who felt unheard or unappreciated from others often “entered a ‘spiral of silence’. In doing so, they continued to feel more and more isolated, often leading to a feeling that life is not worth living, resulting in their decision to permanently silence themselves with suicide.”<sup>70</sup>

Marion Knell in her book, *Burn-Up or Splash Down*, recommends that mission agencies or churches provide debriefings to missionaries and military chaplains during their re-entry transition. A debriefing provides the opportunity for them “to tell their stories, to express their feelings about their assignments and their performances, to evaluate their experiences, and to analyze the stages of re-entry they are going through.”<sup>71</sup> In some cases, when the missionary or military chaplain has suffered a traumatic experience, they should receive a critical incident debriefing by a trained professional or referred for pastoral counseling. One of the best ways churches can support military chaplains and missionaries is to simply to provide ample opportunities for them to share their ministry stories publicly and privately.

*The Art of Coming Home* observes that one of the greatest issues facing those in re-entry transition is a gnawing sense of loneliness. Missionaries and military veterans often say,

“There is no one who understands what you’re going through, no one to reassure you that the fears, doubts, anger, and pain you feel are perfectly normal, no one to promise you that you’re not losing your mind.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Taylor & Francis Group, “Veterans suffer from ‘culture shock’ when returning to university,” *ScienceDaily*, April 26, 2019, [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/04/190426100341.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/04/190426100341.htm).

<sup>71</sup> Knell, 64.

<sup>72</sup> Storti, 31.

Military chaplains experience this same sense of loss during their re-entry transition. They may surprisingly find that their names have dropped off of prayer chains or omitted from local pastor lists. Very few of them, if any, receive a “thank you” or welcome home letter from their home church or denominational headquarters. In preparation to avoid such potential disappointments, Storti recommends that those in re-entry transition follow a four-stage model:

- 1) leave-taking (closure with friends and places at your departure field)
- 2) the honeymoon (taking a few weeks to reacclimate yourself back home)
- 3) reverse culture shock (the realization that your time away on the mission field has caused you to function as a ‘marginal person’ at home instead of at the center of society)
- 4) readjustment (to your new normal).<sup>73</sup>

Obviously, re-entry transition takes time, possibly twelve months or longer. Storti recommends that those returning from another cultural environment should “seek out others (with a similar experience) for a sympathetic ear”<sup>74</sup> For example, military chaplains in transition may consider becoming a member of a veterans’ organization like the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars, joining a military chaplaincy network, participating in a non-profit organization that supports veteran causes, serving as a senior mentor or coach for other military chaplains, providing pastoral counseling to veterans of a local church, or volunteering to provide chaplain duties at a National Cemetery for the funerals of military veterans.

Pastors and churches should strongly consider using some of the recommendations in Storti’s book to understand the challenges faced by military chaplains as well as veterans separating from Armed Services. Additionally, the book will serve as a great resource to develop a pastoral care ministry for military chaplains, veterans, foreign missionaries, and their families.

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<sup>73</sup> Storti, 58.

<sup>74</sup> Storti, 41.

## Conclusion

An intentional process to assist military chaplains in their transition back to civilian life remains almost a neglected or overlooked ministry. This project found very few examples of transition assistance ministry for military chaplains other than those faith groups with a strong hierarchical structure like, for example, the Roman Catholic Church. In the free church tradition where local congregations have autonomy, the primary way that military chaplains experience a successful transition experience back into civilian ministry is by maintaining a strong networking relationship and remaining in constant communication with their sending church. Churches, in turn, should take intentional steps to increase their regular and prayerful support to the military chaplains they have sent out as an extension of their ministry to members of the Armed Services.

Today's military chaplains provide a ministry that comes at a great cost. A 2011 Pew Research study found that "nearly a third (32%) of all veterans say they had a military-related experience while serving that they found to be emotionally traumatic or distressing—a proportion that increases to 43% among those who served since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks."<sup>75</sup>

According to Article 24 of Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field (commonly referred to as Geneva Convention I), "chaplains are protected personnel in their function and capacity as religious ministers (and are prohibited) from bearing arms and are classified as noncombatants."<sup>76</sup> That said, many military chaplains have suffered the wounds of war since 9/11 along with their fellow veterans.

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<sup>75</sup> Rich Morin, "The Difficult Transition From Military To Civilian Life," *Pew Research Center*, December 8, 2011, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2011/12/08/the-difficult-transition-from-military-to-civilian-life/>.

<sup>76</sup> Joint Guide 1-05, "Religious Affairs in Joint Operations," February 21, 2018, accessed May 16, 2020, [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn\\_jg/jg1\\_05.pdf](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jg1_05.pdf).

Countless military chaplains have been awarded the Purple Heart medal, the Bronze Star, and the Combat Action Badge for their heroic ministry actions in combat. One chaplain has been killed in action, the first chaplain since the Vietnam War. Another chaplain died from his wounds in a combat action. Many military chaplains today struggle with the invisible wounds of war from post-traumatic stress and mild traumatic brain injury. The church must recognize its important role in supporting the pastoral and personal needs of our military chaplains and their families as they transition from the Armed Services and re-enter civilian life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROJECT DESIGN

#### **Introduction**

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God,  
which is in you through the laying on of my hands.<sup>1</sup>

The urgency for this project was confirmed several years ago after I received a disturbing telephone call from the president and CEO of a large faith-based nonprofit organization that provided support to physically disabled veterans. This individual had contacted me weeks earlier asking for my personal recommendation of a retired military chaplain colonel with exemplary strategic leadership skills who might be interested in a full-time position as the executive director of this national organization. He said, “I just had a disheartening conversation with the chaplain you referred to me. He bluntly told me that he had no interest in the position I offered him because he was retired from the military and done with the ministry!” Shocked and embarrassed, I apologized to the CEO for the chaplain’s unprofessional attitude and, at the same time, immediately removed the retired chaplain’s name from our office’s contact list.

While the above story is uncharacteristic of most military chaplains, it certainly caused me to reflect on the reason the chaplain mentioned above had such a negative attitude towards an exciting ministry opportunity after transitioning back into the civilian environment. What made the chaplain react so negatively? Did he have a bad experience as a military chaplain? Had we failed as his denominational endorser to provide him and his family adequate administrative support and pastoral care during his military ministry? How many other Southern Baptist endorsed military chaplains have felt the same way? These questions remained unanswered at the time primarily

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 1:6.

because our denomination had no transition platform in place to support military chaplains as they separated from the Armed Services and returned to civilian life and ministry.

The purpose of this project was to establish an intentional ministry transition assistance program for military chaplains transitioning out of the Armed Services to ensure they experience a positive and successful return to civilian life and ministry. Such a resource has the potential to assist foreign missionaries and civilian pastors as they experience frequent transition challenges during their respective ministry careers. The findings in this project can also assist Christian colleges and seminaries in their curriculum development for chaplaincy ministry training. It can also serve as a valuable resource for Southern Baptist agencies and institutions in their development of pastoral care training courses for pastors and church staff.

### **Project Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guided this project:

- 1) A clear understanding of God's calling to the ministry will positively influence the transition from the military chaplaincy back into civilian ministry.
- 2) The longevity of ministry prior to military service will positively influence the transition from the military chaplaincy back to the civilian ministry environment.
- 3) A strong connection with the denominational endorsing agency and a local Southern Baptist church will positively influence the transition from military chaplain back to the civilian ministry setting.
- 4) An intentional exit strategy will positively influence the transition from the military chaplaincy to a civilian ministry role.

## **Thesis-Project Preparation**

### **Pre-Survey Questionnaire**

The project began with the development of a pre-survey questionnaire to assess endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains' general thoughts, concerns, and plans regarding their future ministry transitions (see Appendix A). It provided an important starting point to validate the need for a transition assistance mechanism to support military chaplains transitioning out of the Armed Services back into a civilian ministry role. Additionally, the questionnaire served as a valuable pre-survey instrument, alerting the researcher to any potential transition issues that should be addressed and measured during the formal survey.

The researcher administered the questionnaire to approximately 150 endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains during the 2018 Annual Southern Baptist Chaplains Training Conferences<sup>2</sup>. All the chaplains who completed the questionnaire served in a vocational (paid) or volunteer status and ministered in a variety of institutional settings around the world, including the U.S. Armed Services, healthcare, community service, correctional facilities, disaster relief, corporate, and law enforcement.

The results of the ministry transition pre-survey questionnaire (see Appendix B) revealed high scores in three areas: self-awareness, strong communication skills, and professional ministry competencies. Ninety-four percent of the chaplains strongly agreed with question number 11 ("I understand my strengths and weaknesses and how others see me, as well as the activities that lead me to frustration")<sup>3</sup>. Studies predict that people with high scores on measures of self-awareness or emotional intelligence (EQ) tend to excel in interpersonal skills, leadership competencies, and

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<sup>2</sup> "Ministry Transition Self-Assessment Survey." Administered at the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Chaplaincy Professional Development Training Conferences: Santa Ana, CA, February 26-28, 2018; Oklahoma City, OK, April 23-25, 2018; and October 22-24, 2018, Ridgecrest, NC.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix A, Ministry Transition Self-Assessment Survey.

stress management, especially across “one or more cultural settings.”<sup>4</sup> A high sense of self-awareness is a key factor to ensure a successful transition into a new cultural and work environment. This is especially critical since, according to a Gallup poll, “55% of U.S. workers often find identity from their job”<sup>5</sup> instead of considering work as simply a means towards the fulfillment of their life’s destiny.

Over ninety percent of the chaplains agreed on the importance of strong communication skills as an asset to a successful ministry transition (Question #14- “I have good conversation skills that will help me during my transition process”)<sup>6</sup>. Military chaplains develop exemplary verbal, non-verbal, and written communicative skills throughout their careers. These valuable skills can easily be transferred as they transition to a new environment, ensuring success in their new ministry positions, roles, and organizations.

Eighty percent of the chaplains who took the pre-survey questionnaire felt confident that their ministry education and experience as a chaplain would make them highly competitive as they transitioned to a new ministry role (Question 5- “I have the professional certifications and experience that make me competitive for the type of ministry I plan to pursue in the future”)<sup>7</sup>. Military chaplains attain many of specialized ministry skills and certifications during their military service, most of which will support their ministry roles and environments beyond their current settings. Some of these competences include pastoral care, crisis intervention, mentoring and coaching skills, cultural worldview, marriage and family counseling, conflict resolution, mental health ministry, suicide intervention, ethical decision-making, and moral leadership.

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<sup>4</sup> Howard Gardner and Thomas Hatch, “Multiple Intelligences Go To School: Educational Implications of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences,” *Educational Researcher*, 18, 8 (1989): 5.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Rifkin, “Annual Work and Education Poll,” *The Gallup Poll Briefing*, Washington, DC: The Gallup Organization, August 22, 2014, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/175400/workers-sense-identity-job.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> Appendix A.

The results of the pre-survey questionnaire revealed that chaplains scored lowest in transition planning beyond their current ministry assignment although some of them planned to transition within the next twelve months. Only sixty percent of these chaplains had begun any kind of intentional transition planning. Many of them had not reached an agreement with their spouse or family members on the optimum time for their ministry transition. Approximately sixty-four percent of the chaplains were in the process of developing a comprehensive network of pastors, employers, chaplains, denominational leaders, peers, etc. who would assist them during their ministry transition.

One cannot underestimate the importance of military chaplains taking time to develop an intentional transition plan prior to their returning to civilian life. According to a recent study, between 40 and 75% of veterans separating from the Armed Services describe some difficulties managing this major change in their lives, including “problems adjusting to educational or work settings, substance abuse, homelessness, financial mismanagement issues, confrontations with the criminal justice system, family problems, and military-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) responses.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, they have the challenge of preparing for “the loss of military culture and identity, camaraderie (i.e., relationship connections), and support systems. When military chaplains leave the Armed Services and re-enter the highly relational and autonomous nature of most denominational cultures, they often struggle to discover new sources of ministry connections, community, or pastoral leadership opportunities.

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<sup>8</sup> James Whitworth, Ben Smet, & Brian Anderson, “Reconceptualizing the U.S. Military’s Transition Assistance Program: The Success in Transition Model,” *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 6, 1 (2020): 25–35. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v6i1.144>.

## Chaplaincy Ministry Transition Training

Following the pre-survey questionnaire, the researcher presented the first of several ministry transition presentations<sup>9</sup> to endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains (see Appendix C). The primary purpose of this training was to initiate a discussion with chaplain audiences on the reality of ministry transitions and the importance of intentionally planning for them. Most of the chaplains stated they had never received formal training or participated in discussions regarding ministry transition planning. During the Q&A portion of the presentation, several chaplains shared their positive and negative ministry transition stories. It was a cathartic moment for some chaplains who finally had the opportunity to address their deep-seated pain of being involuntarily released from a previous ministry position. For others, the training was a helpful wake-up call and “conversation starter” regarding the importance of developing an intentional transition plan for their respective ministries. As a result, transition training has become part of the Southern Baptist chaplaincy’s annual training topics.

### Focus Group Discussion: Military Chaplains In Transition

In 2018 I attended the Military Missions Network<sup>10</sup> “Flagship” Church Conference. Held on a biennial basis, the conference brings together pastors and Christian leaders, denominational agencies, chaplains, para-church ministry leaders, and active and retired military members for the express purpose of networking and partnering together to effectively minister to the US military communities around the world. The Flagship organizers invited me to facilitate a focus group’s discussion on the topic, “Military Chaplains Effectively Transitioning To Ministry Beyond Military Service.” The focus group, comprised of three retired and two active-duty military chaplains,

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<sup>9</sup> “Transition In Ministry” presentation at the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Chaplaincy Professional Development Training Conferences: Santa Ana, CA, February 26-28, 2018; Oklahoma City, OK, April 23-25, 2018; and October 22-24, 2018, Ridgecrest, NC.

<sup>10</sup> Military Missions Network connects evangelical churches, chaplains, and ministries collaborating for a greater synergy in outreach ministry to the US military worldwide, <https://www.militarymissionsnetwork.com>.

concluded that military chaplains separating from the Armed Services faced three distinct challenges.

First, the group felt that military chaplains struggle with the continuity of their calling beyond a military context due their loss of identity, sense of purpose, and relational support. Unfortunately, most denominations have no process in place to help military chaplains reorient their ministry back to a local church setting or civilian environment. Second, the focus group concluded that churches often have a misconception or stigma regarding the validity of the chaplaincy ministry. Military chaplains serve in a diverse, pluralistic setting where they have the sacred responsibility to perform or coordinate a comprehensive religious support program for all the military members under their pastoral care.

Some within Christian circles fail to understand how military chaplains can manage such a broad spectrum of cultural worldviews and religious support responsibilities as experienced within the military environment without either being forced to water down the Gospel message or compromise their own Christian faith. The Apostle Paul, when faced with similar suspicions by his opponents said, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”<sup>11</sup> Successful military chaplains quickly learn to cooperate with the religious views of others without compromising their own faith. Evangelical theologian J. I. Packer, in one of the last interviews before his death, said, “I should like to be remembered as someone who was always courteous in controversy, but without compromise.”<sup>12</sup> J. I. Packer would have been a great military chaplain.

Third, the focus group concluded that it is often difficult to translate the ministry of the military chaplain back into the context of the local church. One group member remarked, “What makes it difficult is that you can’t describe the military chaplaincy in a monolithic term like most

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22.

<sup>12</sup> J. I. Packer, “In His Own Words,” *Crossway*, July 18, 2020, YouTube video, 13:48, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/j-i-packer-in-his-own-words-2/>.

traditional ministry leadership positions.”<sup>12</sup> During the typical military chaplain’s career, they gain experience in a variety of ministry roles, including serving as a multi-site preacher to congregations of hundreds, a family life pastor, a crisis intervention counselor, a homiletics instructor, an executive pastor, a community pastor responsible for a multi-faith religious program, a hospital chaplain, a religious curriculum writer/small group leader, a mentor to new chaplains, and a religious advisor to senior governmental leaders. Regardless of their military ministry roles and experience, they remain faithful to the task of fulfilling the Great Commission and “equipping the saints for the work of ministry.”<sup>13</sup>

The focus group came to the following conclusions regarding essential planning factors for military chaplains as they transition back to a civilian environment: 1) Take time to re-visit your calling to the ministry; 2) maintain connectivity with your denominational endorser and churches; 3) develop a deliberate exit strategy at least two years from separating from military service; receive buy-in on your transition plan for your spouse and family; and 4) build in a deliberate sabbatical of 6-12 months into your transition plan.<sup>14</sup>

The focus group also recommended the following actions churches should consider in their support to military chaplains transitioning from the Armed Services: 1) Maintain healthy and intentional relationships with chaplains in your sphere of ministry; 2) include military chaplains regularly in the church’s prayer ministry; 3) utilize your denominational network to identify ministry opportunities for transitioning military chaplains; 4) assess what internal resources that might assist military chaplains in transition (welcome committee, training events, mentoring, personal counseling, etc.); and 5) offer ministry opportunities to military chaplains.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4:12.

<sup>14</sup> The Flagship Church Conference, “Focus Group: Chaplains Effectively Transitioning to Ministry Beyond Military Service,” Shadow Mountain Community Church, El Cajon, CA, October 29-30, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> The Flagship Church Conference.

## **Research Design Overview**

This project was conducted using two research methodologies: quantitative data collection and analysis from an on-line survey with closed-ended questions and multiple-choice answer options, and by narrative analysis through interviews with a small sample of retired chaplains.

Prior to beginning the research methodology, the researcher completed a consultation with Dr. Bryan Auday, Professor of Psychology at Gordon College, regarding the merits of this thesis project. Dr. Auday commented, "Overall, your project has high potential for impacting former military chaplains in transition from the Armed Services to thrive as civilian pastors."<sup>16</sup> The researcher used the SurveyMonkey cloud-based survey platform tool by Momentive, Inc. to compile quantitative information for the project. This survey instrument is available for purchase on-line by individuals and businesses.

The survey was comprised of twenty questions, including two personal demographic questions (Appendix D). It was emailed to 157 Southern Baptist military chaplains who had separated or retired from the Armed Services within the past ten years (2010-2020). Four emails bounced and two chaplains opted out of taking the survey. A total of 52 out of 151 chaplains completed the survey for a good survey response rate of 29%.

The researcher used the narrative research methodology to collect and analyze the ministry transition experiences of four Southern Baptist military chaplains who had separated or retired from the Armed Services in the past ten years. The researcher interviewed each chaplain using a standard template (Appendix F). Most of the interviews were conducted by virtual means or telephonically. One interview was completed in person with a chaplain. Two of the chaplains gave permission for the researcher to record their interview.

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<sup>16</sup> Dr. Bryan C. Auday, thesis-project consultation comments in email message to author, June 10, 2019.

## **Quantitative Research Methodology and Analysis of Survey Data**

The survey phase of the research was administered in Calendar Year 2020 using an on-line survey sent to all endorsed Southern Baptist military chaplains who separated or retired from the Armed Services between the years 2010 and 2020. The following table provides a summary of the surveys emailed and the response rate:

Table 1. A summary of surveys emailed and responses.

Surveys Sent	Surveys Returned
157 (6 unusable)	52 (29% response rate)

### **Methodology For the Survey Results**

The researcher used three of the four research questions/hypotheses stated earlier in this chapter to organize and summarize the survey results. After stating each research question, the researcher will display the appropriate survey table/s to answer the question.

### **Demographics of the Survey Participants**

The following demographics summarize the personal data of the chaplains who completed the survey: (1) age called to the ministry; (2) race; (3) branch of military service; and (4) years served as a military chaplain. (see Tables 2-5).

#### **Age When Called Into The Ministry.**

Most of the military chaplains (55.8%) answered the calling into the ministry during the “18-24” age group. The next largest group (21.2%) was “under 18”, and only two chaplains (3.8%) were called into ministry between “35-40” and “greater than 40” (see Table 2).

Table 2. Age When Called Into The Ministry (percentages).

Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-40	>40
11 (21.2)	29 (55.8)	10 (19.2)	1 (1.9)	1 (1.9)

## **Race of Survey Participants.**

Most military chaplains (92.3%) completing the survey are in the “Caucasian” race category (see Table 3). The survey participants also included two “Asian or Pacific Islander” chaplains, one “Hispanic or Latino” chaplain, one “Another Race”, with no African American or “American Indian or Alaska Native” in the survey group.

Table 3. Race of Survey Participants (percentages).

African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino	Caucasian	Native American	Other
0	2 (3.9)	1 (1.9)	48 (92.3)	0	1 (1.9)

## **Branch of Service.**

The majority of military chaplains (75%) served in the United States Army, with the next largest percentage (15.4%) having served in the United States Navy, and the smallest group (9.6%) in the United States Air Force. There were no respondents for the Marine Corps (an independent branch of service that falls under the Department of the Navy) and the United States Coast Guard (the only branch of service that serves under the Department of Homeland Security) whose direct chaplaincy support comes from the Navy. (See Table 4).

Table 4. Branch of Service (percentages).

Air Force	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Coast Guard
5 (9.6)	39 (75.0)	8 (15.4)	0	0

## **Years Served As A Military Chaplain.**

The majority of military chaplains (32.7%) served for “20-25” years in uniform with the next largest group (25%) having served for “26-30” years. The survey revealed that one group (19.2%) of military chaplains served for “10-19” years, and another group (19.2%) for over 30 years. Only two chaplains in the survey group served for less than ten years. (See Table 5).

Table 5. Years Served As A Military Chaplain (percentages).

< 10 years	10-19	20-25	26-30	>30
2 (3.9)	10 (19.2)	17 (32.7)	13 (25.0)	10 (19.2)

### Hypothesis 1: Survey Results

The primary intent of hypothesis 1 was to examine how a military chaplain's understanding of their calling to ministry and the military chaplaincy impacted their transition back to a civilian ministry setting. The researcher assumed that the survey participants understood a general calling to the vocational ministry since the Southern Baptist Convention, like most denominations, require a minimum of two years' ministry experience for those seeking Federal endorsement as a military chaplain. Hypothesis 1 was stated as follows: "A clear understanding of God's calling to the ministry will positively influence the transition from the military chaplaincy back into civilian ministry." The researcher chose three specific periods of time to evaluate the participants' calling to the military chaplaincy: (1) pre-military chaplaincy; (2) vocational ministry as a military chaplain; and (3) post-military chaplaincy.

#### **Pre-military Chaplaincy.**

An overwhelming number of survey participants (96.2%) felt a strong sense of calling into the military chaplaincy. Most of the survey group "strongly agreed" (80.8%) they had a clear calling to ministry as a military chaplain, with 15.4% who sensed God was leading them to pursue the military chaplaincy as a vocation. One chaplain neither agreed nor disagreed regarding their call to the military chaplaincy. Another chaplain disagreed that they had a strong sense of calling to the military ministry. (see Table 6).

Table 6. (Q6) Initial Sense of Calling To the Military Chaplaincy (percentages).

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
42 (80.7)	8(15.4)	1 (1.92)	1 (1.92)	0

## **Vocational Ministry As A Military Chaplain.**

During their tenure as military chaplains, the survey group continued to strongly agree or agree that they sensed God's call on their lives (96.1%) with no significant drop from their initial vocational calling to military ministry. (See Table 7).

Table 7. (Q10) Continuous Sense of God's Calling As A Military Chaplain (percentages).

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
40 (76.9)	10 (19.2)	1 (1.92)	1 (1.92)	0

## **Post-military Chaplaincy.**

The participants, having transitioned from military service back to civilian life within a ten-year span at the time they took this survey, strongly agreed or agreed (94.2%) that they continued to have a strong sense of calling to the ministry. This represents only a slight drop (2%) in their clear vocational identity as ministers after having served for decades in the militaryministry. One chaplain neither agreed nor disagreed regarding their sense vocational direction while two chaplains disagreed that they continued to maintain a clear direction for future ministry. (See Table 8).

Table 8. (Q18) Calling To the Ministry Post-Military Chaplaincy (percentages).

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
36 (69.2)	13 (25.0)	1 (1.92)	2 (3.9)	0

## Hypothesis 2: Survey Results

The primary intent of hypothesis 2 was to assess the relationship that existed between military chaplains, their denominational endorser, and a local Southern Baptist churchduring the chaplain's military ministry and transition back to civilian life. Hypothesis 2 was stated as follows: "A strong connection with the denominational endorsing agency and a local Southern Baptist church will positively influence the transition from military chaplain back to the civilian ministry setting." The

researcher chose four relational milestones to evaluate the chaplains' potential successful transition from the Armed Services: (1) sending church's support; (2) chaplain's denominational connectivity; (3) endorser's support during transition; and (4) church's support during transition.

### **Sending Church's Support of the Military Chaplaincy.**

Denominational endorsers expect their military chaplains to maintain a relationship with their sending church.

A Sending Church is a local community of Christ-followers who have made a covenant together to be prayerful, deliberate, and proactive in developing, commissioning, and sending their own members both locally and globally, often in partnership with other churches or agencies, and continuing to encourage, support, and advocate for them while making disciples cross-culturally.<sup>17</sup>

Most survey participants (75%) strongly agreed or agreed that their sending church supported their vocational calling into the military chaplaincy, with the next larger group (19.2) neither agreed nor disagreed that their sending church supported their ministry decision. Two chaplains disagreed that their local church affirmed their calling to the military chaplaincy, and one survey participant noted that their sending church strongly opposed their calling to the military chaplaincy. (See Table 9).

Table 9. (Q8) Sending Church's Support of My Calling As A Military Chaplain (percentages).

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
30 (57.7)	9 (17.3)	10 (19.2)	2 (3.9)	1 (1.9)

### **Chaplain's Denominational Connectivity.**

The majority of survey participant's (92.3%) strongly agreed or agreed that they maintained contact with their denominational endorser throughout their tenure as a military chaplain. The military chaplain-endorser relationship is critically important because the endorser endorsing agency is the crucial link between the military chaplain and the sending churches. Two survey

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<sup>17</sup> Bradley Bell, *The Sending Church Defined* (Knoxville, TN: The Upstream Collective, 2020), 19.

participants neither agreed nor disagreed that they regularly communicated with their endorser, with two other participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they remained in contact with their endorser. (See Table 10).

Table 10. (Q11) Maintained Regular Contact With My Endorser (percentages).

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
27 (51.9)	21 (40.4)	2 (3.9)	1 (1.9)	1 (1.9)

### **Endorser's Support During Transition.**

The researcher noticed a dramatic change in the military chaplain-endorser's relationship during the transition back into civilian life. Only 27% of the survey participants strongly agreed or agreed that their endorser played an important supportive role during their transition out of the Armed Forces. A second group neither agreed nor disagreed that their endorser assisted them during their transition back to a civilian ministry environment. The largest group of the survey participants (44.2%) strongly disagreed, disagreed, or didn't reply to the endorser's support or guidance during their transition from the Armed Services. (See Table 11).

Table 11. (Q15) Endorser's Support During Transition (percentages).

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Doesn't apply
7 (13.5)	7 (13.5)	15 (28.8)	8 (15.4)	11 (21.2)	4 (7.7)

### **Church's Support To Chaplains In Transition.**

The majority of the survey participants (44.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their local church assisted their transition from the Armed Services. A smaller group neither agreed nor disagreed that the local church was helpful in their transition from the military chaplaincy back to the civilian environment. Only 30% of the survey group strongly agreed or agreed that the local church assisted their transition from the Armed Services. (See Table 12).

Table 12. (Q16) Church's Support During Transition To Civilian Life (percentages).

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
6 (11.6)	10 (19.2)	14 (26.9)	15 (28.9)	8 (15.4)

### Hypothesis 3: Survey Results

The primary intent of hypothesis number 3 was to consider the effect that a pastor's ministry experience prior to their becoming a military chaplain had on their transition back to civilian life after separating from the Armed Services. Hypothesis 3 was stated as follows: "The longevity of ministry prior to military service will positively influence the transition from the military chaplaincy back to the civilian ministry environment." The researcher looked at four measurement criteria to evaluate their effect on a military chaplain's successful transition from the Armed Services back to the civilian ministry: (1) prior ministry experience; (2) networking during transition process; (3) post-military ministry; and (4) transition experience.

#### Prior Ministry Experience.

Military chaplains with 5-10 years of civilian ministry experience served primarily as pastors or pastoral staff in a local church setting (61.6%) prior to entering the Armed Services versus 44.4% of those with 2-4 years and 0-2 years of previous civilian ministry. Those with 0-2 years of ministry experience (60.6%) prior to the military chaplains served as denominational staff or in ministry leadership roles outside of the local church, with those in the 2-4 years' survey group (45.6%) the 5-10 years' group (38.3%) serving in these capacities. (See Table 13).

Table 13. (Q5) Prior Ministry Experience Before Military Chaplaincy (percentages).

Prior ministry experience	Pastor	Pastoral staff	Denominational Staff	Ministry outside church
0-2 years	4 (44.4)	0	3 (38.4)	2 (22.2)
2-4 years	8 (44.4)	0	7 (38.9)	3 (16.7)
5-10 years	23 (48.9)	6 (12.7)	13 (27.7)	5 (10.6)

## **Networking During Transition.**

The 2-4 years' survey group (64.3%) recorded the strongest support for a mature network of pastors, chaplains, and friends during their transition process, with the 0-2 years' survey group (50.4%) and the 5-10 years' survey group (44.8%) recognizing the importance of networking. The 0-2 years' survey group disagreed (37.5%) that they had taken the time to develop a strong network prior to transitioning from the military chaplaincy, with the 2-4 years' survey group who disagreed (21.4%) on their having built a network to support their transition to the civilian ministry. The 5-10 years' survey group disagreed (17.3%) or strongly disagreed (3.5%) that they developed a transition network. (See Table 14).

Table 14. (Q17) Impact of Strong Network During Transition (percentages).

<b>Networking</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>0-2 years</b>	1 (12.5)	3 (37.5)	1 (12.5)	3 (37.5)	0
<b>2-4 years</b>	2 (14.3)	7 (50.0)	2 (14.3)	3 (21.4)	0
<b>5-10 years</b>	6 (20.7)	7 (24.1)	11 (37.9)	4 (13.8)	1 (3.5)

## **Post-military Ministry.**

Of the 52 survey participants, the largest group (51.9%) served or presently serve in a pastoral ministry within the local church. Twenty of the survey participants (52%) identified themselves as pastors, pastoral staff, or lay leaders, and six of them (11.5%) were serving as denominational staff. A total of nineteen (36.5%) survey participants listed “other ministry” (26.9%) opportunities (faith-based non-profit staff, private practice as a pastoral counselor, Christian life coach, etc.). Five in the survey group (9.6%) answered that they were no longer in the ministry. (See Table 15).

**Table 15. (Q9) Ministry Activity Since Leaving the Military Chaplaincy (percentages).**  
(Note: Some participants checked more than one ministry position).

Post-military ministry	Pastor or pastoral staff	Denominational staff	Lay Leader Ministry	Other	Not involved in ministry
<b>0-2 years</b>	4 (50.0)	1 (12.5)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)	1 (12.5)
<b>2-4 years</b>	8 (57.1)	3 (21.4)	2 (14.3)	3 (21.4)	1 (7.1)
<b>5-10 years</b>	11 (49.3)	3 (10.7)	6 (21.4)	7 (60.7)	3 (10.7)
<b>TOTAL Survey Group</b>	21	6	6	14	5

### Transition Experience.

Most of the survey participants answered that they had good to excellent experiences in their transition from the Armed Services. The 0-2 years' survey group had the greatest success in their transition process with four chaplains (50%) who scored it as excellent and two chaplains (25%) who had a good experience. The 2-4 years' survey group had the second-best transition experience, with five chaplains marking it as excellent (35.7%) and seven chaplains having a good transition (50%). Thirteen of 5-10 years' survey group experienced an excellent transition with four participants having a good experience (13.8%). Two chaplains in the 0-2-year group had a neutral to fair transition experience (25%) with twelve of the 2-4-year survey group had a fair to poor transition experience (25%). Survey participants in the 5-10-year group recorded the worst transition experience with twelve chaplains having a neutral to poor transition (41.4%). (See Table 16).

**Table 16. (Q12) Transition Experience From the Military Chaplaincy (percentages)**

Transition	Excellent	Good	Neutral	Fair	Poor
<b>0-2 years</b>	4 (50.0)	5 (35.7)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	0
<b>2-4 years</b>	5 (35.7)	7 (50.0)	0	1 (7.1)	1 (7.1)
<b>5-10 years</b>	13 (44.8)	4 (13.8)	4 (13.8)	4 (13.8)	4 (13.8)

## **Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis: Case Studies**

One of the primary purposes of this research project was to discover the personal experiences of Southern Baptist military chaplains transitioning back to civilian ministry. As a result, the researcher chose to collect and analyze qualitative data using the case study methodology. Sharan B. Merriam in her book, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, writes that “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base”<sup>18</sup> of a particular research topic.

### **Case Study Methodology**

The researcher used the semi-structured interview to gather data for the case studies. The primary advantage of this method is that it “gives the latitude (for the interviewer) to deviate from a set of questions to probe the respondent for more meaningful information” pertinent to the research project. The researcher initially sent an introductory email to each of the selected survey participants requesting their support to be interviewed regarding their transition experiences from the Armed Services back to civilian life. The researcher followed up with a personal phone call to the participants. Each one of them expressed a great interest in the research project and gave their verbal informed consent to participate in the case study. The researcher provided the case study participants with a copy of the proposed questions before the interview (see Appendix 4). Three of the participants’ responses were recorded manually and one of them agreed to a digital recording of their interview. Each interview lasted approximately 45-50 minutes. The researcher advised the participants of the purpose and use of the research according to the policies of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Doctor of Ministry Program.

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<sup>18</sup> Sharan A. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 3.

## Research Participants

The researcher selected four retired Southern Baptist military chaplains<sup>19</sup> who were able to clearly articulate their experiences and challenges of transitioning from the Armed Services and returning to a civilian environment. All the chaplains in these case studies had separated or retired from the military within a ten-year period and during the writing of this project. The researcher assigned each of the chaplains with a pseudonym.

### **Chaplain John<sup>20</sup>**

John transitioned from the Armed Forces Chaplaincy at the age of forty-seven. He was endorsed for fifteen years as a Southern Baptist active-duty military chaplain. Prior to military service, he served four years as a pastor of a small Southern Baptist church. After one year of prayerful discernment, he separated from the Armed Services and returned to his hometown to be near his family. Since leaving the military, he has served as senior pastor of two Southern Baptist churches. He recently founded a faith-based nonprofit organization that supports veterans and first responders. He is also currently endorsed as a volunteer police chaplain.

### **Chaplain David<sup>21</sup>**

David transitioned from the Armed Forces Chaplaincy at the age of forty-nine. He was endorsed for twenty-seven years as a military chaplain in a Reserve component. Prior to military service, he served two years as a pastor and six years as a foreign missionary. Upon separation from the Armed Services, he served for over ten years as a staff director of a national Southern Baptist denominational agency. He has served as an adjunct professor at several Southern Baptist seminaries. He currently serves as an assistant professor of chaplaincy ministry at an evangelical

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<sup>19</sup> All interviews were confidential; the names of the interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with a retired military chaplain, August 23, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with a retired military chaplain, August 27, 2018.

seminary. He also serves as a lay leader in his local church. He no longer feels called to serve full time on the pastoral staff of a local church.

### **Chaplain Allen<sup>22</sup>**

Allen transitioned from the Armed Forces Chaplaincy at the age of fifty-nine after serving for twenty-nine years as a Southern Baptist active-duty military chaplain. Prior to the military chaplaincy, he served in the Armed Forces for six years as a commissioned officer and three years as a senior pastor. Since leaving the military, he has served as executive director for a national Southern Baptist denominational agency for over ten years. He has also served as an intentional interim pastor on three occasions for two Southern Baptist churches. He currently serves as a board member on several faith-based nonprofit organizations that support veteran causes. Allen continues to look for opportunities to serve as an intentional interim pastor.

### **Chaplain Sean<sup>23</sup>**

Sean transitioned from the Armed Forces Chaplaincy at the age of fifty-one. He was endorsed for twenty-three years as a Southern Baptist active-duty military chaplain. Prior to military service, he served three years as the senior pastor of a Southern Baptist church. After separating from the Armed Services, he served on the staff of a Southern Baptist denominational agency for six years. He is currently endorsed as a volunteer chaplain and continues to provide lay leadership ministry in his local church. He also recently enrolled in a Ph.D. program with the intention of teaching at a Christian college or denominational seminary. At the present time, he no longer feels called to serve on the pastoral staff of a local church.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with a retired military chaplain, August 21, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Recorded interview with a retired military chaplain, August 28, 2018.

## Case Study Limitations

Military chaplains interviewed for these case studies were limited to those endorsed by the Southern Baptist Convention. According to the Department of Defense, approximately 225 denominations and ecclesiastical endorsing agencies endorse military chaplains for the Armed Services.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, this case study limits the scope in how other denominations or faith groups provide transition assistance for their chaplains separating from the Armed Forces. Second, the conclusions in these case studies apply primarily to the unique polity and leadership structure of Southern Baptist churches which are autonomous in nature with full power and authority to conduct their own individual congregational decisions, in this case, regarding military chaplains as they transition back to a civilian ministry setting. However, the observations and conclusions from these case studies would also apply to other denominations with different governing structures.

Third, the Southern Baptist Convention of churches does not ordain women. Therefore, all the participants in this case study were male chaplains. Although this study does not discuss the challenges female military chaplains may face when transitioning from the Armed Services, the conclusions from the male participants apply to their experience as well.

Fourth, all the participants interviewed in this case study had previously retired from the Armed Services as military chaplains with fifteen or more years of Federal service as a military chaplain. However, the observations and conclusions in this case study would apply as well to the transition experiences those military chaplains who voluntarily or involuntarily separated from the Armed Services.

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<sup>24</sup> US Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary For Personnel and Readiness, "Endorsing Organizations and Agencies." Accessed July 21, 2021. <https://prhome.defense.gov/M-RA/MPP/AFCB/Endorsements/>.

## Findings

The purpose of the case study methodology was to explore the personal experiences of Southern Baptist military chaplains during their transition from the Armed Services and how it potentially contributed to their continued ministry in a civilian environment. The researcher conducted the semi-interviews using an interview template (see Appendix F) along with posing questions from the four hypotheses which guided this project:

- (1) A successful transition from the military chaplaincy is a direct corollary of a clear calling to the ministry. (The Irrevocable Call)
- (2) Pastoral leadership experience prior to the military chaplaincy leads to a successful return to the ministry after separation from the Armed Services. (Ministry experience matters)
- (3) Military chaplains who maintain strong, intentional relationships with their denominational endorser and local church of record transition back to civilian ministry. (The Nexus Factor)
- (4) Military chaplains who develop an exit strategy from the Armed Services have a successful transition back to the civilian life and ministry. (The Exit Strategy)

### **The Irrevocable Call.**

Each of the case study participants stated that they answered the calling to vocational ministry during their early teen years. They also firmly believed that the calling to ministry is irrevocable, requiring perseverance due to frequent change, disruption, and challenges. Allen said, “My calling to the ministry has actually set the azimuth for my entire life.” As Christian author Os Guinness writes, “Calling is the key to tracing the story line of our lives and unriddling the meaning of our existence in a chaotic world.”<sup>25</sup>

John stressed the importance of faithfully pursuing God’s irrevocable call to ministry, “God gave me a clear ‘yes’ to the ministry and the military chaplaincy. I felt that same ‘yes’ when it was ‘time’ to leave the military and return to ministry in a local church.” David reflected, “I felt out of

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<sup>25</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 170.

balance for about six months when I transitioned out of the Armed Services. However, my calling to the ministry kept me moored until the Lord opened the next door of opportunity for continued ministry.” Sean confirmed the irrevocable ministry calling on his life, saying that he was prepared for his next ministry assignment as a civilian pastor “months before I transitioned out of the military.”

### **Ministry Experience Matters.**

Shortly before Allen graduated from seminary, he consulted a professor regarding his thoughts about him pursuing the military chaplaincy. The professor said, “Get all the ministry experience you can in the local church before going into the chaplaincy. If you can survive leading a business meeting at a Baptist church, you’ll have no problem serving as a military chaplain!” That said, Allen never lost his love for the local church and had the opportunity to preach at least one revival annually for local Baptist churches. Additionally, he often struggled whether to remain in the military, occasionally sending his resume to pulpit committees in search of a pastor.

John said that he was extremely grateful for his ministry experience as the single staff pastor of a 500-member congregation, “especially since I immediately became responsible as a new chaplain for a multi-staff, multi-site, multi-faith congregation of seven hundred soldiers and their families.” He said the military gave him the opportunity to develop his church planting skills which he would use upon transitioning from the Armed Services.

David attributed his confidence and success as a military chaplain to his weekly responsibilities of preaching, teaching, and pastoring in a local church. He said, “The military expects chaplains to have a standard of excellence in oral and written communications. I quickly learned the importance of those skills in my first pastorate.” Sean remembers overhearing a conversation between a group of new chaplains talking about their civilian ministry experience

prior to the military chaplaincy. “I was totally surprised by the responses of two of the chaplains (not Southern Baptist)”, he said. “One drove a church bus for the youth group, and another said they spent most of their time each week writing letters and cards to troops downrange!” Sean that said he was thankful for his civilian ministry experience that prepared him for the military chaplaincy.

### **The Nexus Factor.**

All four of the case study participants stated they had faithfully followed the Southern Baptist endorser’s guidance to “maintain membership in a Southern Baptist church and develop an accountability relationship with a Southern Baptist church”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, they stayed in regular contact with their endorser by regularly submitting quarterly ministry reports throughout their tenure as military chaplains. Allen said, “I changed my church membership to support a local Southern Baptist church at almost every assignment and I always provided my contact information to the senior Southern Baptist denominational leader.”

Although John was actively involved in local Southern Baptist churches throughout his military chaplaincy, he also maintained his church membership with his sending church. “I did this,” he said, “because I intended to return to ministry in that geographical area after transitioning from the Armed Services.” He remains in his hometown and, after serving as an intentional interim pastor for several churches, he has planted a new and vibrant congregation. Sean stayed actively engaged with local Southern Baptist churches and denominational agencies throughout his military ministry. He had the reputation of being an intercessory prayer leader and, as a result, a denominational agency invited him to become a part of their staff after his transition from the Armed Services.

David told the researcher that he knew of many chaplains who removed themselves from

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<sup>26</sup> *The Southern Baptist Endorsement Manual For Chaplains*, 20.

Southern Baptist churches when they entered the military chaplaincy. “When they put on the uniform, they walked away from the umbrella of the local church. They seemed to forget about where they came from, returning to their denominational life as they approached the end of their military ministry.” He noted that these chaplains had a difficult time returning to the civilian ministry, and some just “didn’t want the headaches of leading a congregation again.”

### **Exit Strategy.**

Each case study participant emphasized the importance of an intentional exit strategy at least twelve months before transitioning from the Armed Services back to civilian life. John stressed the importance of prayer, stating that he prayed for over a year to discern and map out his life and ministry beyond the Armed Services. David and Sean, separately, were in the process of developing their respective exit strategies when they were contacted by Southern Baptist leaders to accept ministry positions with one of the denominational organizations.

Allen had the opportunity to attend a transition workshop for senior military leaders which allowed him to write a philosophy of ministry, develop a long-range ministry strategy, and update his resume. He said that one of the main ideas that came out of this training was the importance of taking a sabbath rest for several months to rest and “think hard about what just happened over the last three decades of military ministry.

### Evaluation of the Research Methodology

The purpose of this research project was to examine the factors that assisted military chaplains to achieve a successful transition from the Armed Services back to the civilian life and ministry. It was accomplished in two ways. First, the researcher analyzed the results of a survey sent to 151 Southern Baptist military chaplains who had separated from Armed Services between 2010 and 2020. Fifty-two chaplains completed the survey for a response rate of 29%. The survey results supported three of the four hypotheses:

(1) that military chaplains who have a clear calling to the ministry prior to entering the Armed Services predominantly maintain their passion for their calling during their military chaplaincy experience and will most likely return to the civilian ministry after separation from the Armed Services;

(2) that military chaplains with less than five years of ministry experience prior to the military chaplaincy are more likely to return to civilian ministry than those with more than five years of civilian ministry; and,

(3) a strong relationship between the sending church, the denominational endorser, and the military chaplain affects a military chaplain successful transition back to the civilian ministry.

This study also used the case study methodology to analyze the personal transition experiences of four retired Southern Baptist military chaplains (John, Allen, David, Sean). The researcher used a semi-structured interview along with the four hypotheses of this project to record each chaplain's responses. All the participants had a strong calling for the ministry and remain actively engaged in their local churches. John and Allen have held several senior pastor or intentional interim pastor positions since transitioning from the Armed Services. Both had less than five years of civilian ministry experience prior to entering the military chaplaincy.

David and Sean have served in denominational staff positions or as lay leaders since their transition from the Armed Services. Both had more than five years of ministry experience prior to becoming military chaplains. All four participants maintained strong connections with their local Southern Baptist churches and other denominational entities throughout their time as military chaplains. As a result, John immediately accepted a pastorate while David, Allen, and Sean were invited to serve on denominational staff positions.

The participants also emphasized the importance of an intentional exit strategy prior to transitioning from the Armed Services. John prayed and planned for over a year regarding his

decision on when to separate from the military. Allen's exit strategy was assisted by a guided transition workshop provided by the Armed Services. David and Sean's exit strategy was influenced by denominational leaders who personally contacted them regarding available ministry opportunities if they were willing to transition from the Armed Services.

The researcher will share conclusions derived from this research in the next chapter. It will show that military chaplains face a challenging season when they transition from the Armed Services back to the civilian life and ministry. However, local church pastors and denominational leaders play a key role and can greatly assist military chaplains find their way back home to the churches that commissioned and sent them out into the Armed Forces for the sake of the Gospel.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.<sup>27</sup>

In many respects, this research project was birthed out of my own painful transition experiences from the Armed Services and back into the civilian ministry setting after having spent over thirty-eight years in uniform. The post-military life for me began with a six-month period of self-reflection while, at the same time, struggling to find any ministry door of opportunity within the context of a local church setting. It was a time of prayer and deep soul-searching, even to the point of wrestling whether the mantle of pastoral leadership was part of my “new normal” outside of the military community.

While reading my (March 5<sup>th</sup>) daily devotional from the Christian classic, My Utmost For His Highest, I gained a renewed perspective on my calling to the ministry:

Joy comes from the complete fulfillment of the specific purpose for which (you) were created and born again. Have you received a ministry from the Lord? If so, you must be faithful to it—to consider your life valuable only for the purpose of fulfilling the ministry (and) to hear Him say to you, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’ (Matthew 25:21).<sup>28</sup>

The words from that short devotional incredibly transformed my thinking and silenced all self-doubt regarding my calling to the ministry. I resolved that day to wait patiently before the Lord in prayer for any future ministry options while, at the same time, looking expectedly for my next ministry assignment. That opportunity occurred in less than a month when I was unexpectedly launched into a ministry assignment which I have continued to enjoy for the past ten years,

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<sup>27</sup> Acts 20: 24 (English Standard Version).

<sup>28</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*. (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1935), 65.

providing strategic visioning and pastoral leadership to over 3700 endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains.

This chapter will reflect on the primary factors discovered in this current study that help determine a military chaplain's successful transition back into a civilian ministry setting. The researcher will also provide applications to the findings that will serve as a valuable road map for military chaplains during their transition process from the Armed Services. Additionally, the researcher hopes this study will serve as a practical resource for Southern Baptist pastors, churches, and other denominational entities who have a vital supportive role to military chaplains returning home to civilian life and the local church ministry.

### **Thesis-Project Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this project was to discover, document, implement, and assess the key factors, best practices, personal experiences, and critical decision points that assisted Southern Baptist chaplains in their successful and unsuccessful transitions from military service back to the civilian environment and ministry. This was accomplished primarily by conducting and analyzing a transition survey of 157 Southern Baptist military chaplains who had separated from the Armed Services between 2010 and 2020. Additionally, the researcher interviewed several former Southern Baptist military chaplains regarding their personal transition process and experiences after separation from the Armed Services. The following four hypotheses were addressed in this research project:

1. A successful transition from the military chaplaincy is a direct corollary of a clear calling to the ministry.
2. Pastoral leadership experience prior to ministry in the military chaplaincy leads to a successful return to the civilian ministry after separation from the Armed Services.
3. Military chaplains who maintain strong, interpersonal relationships with their

denominational endorser and local church transition successfully back to the civilian ministry.

4. Military chaplains who develop an exit strategy from the Armed Services have a successful transition back to the civilian life and ministry.

### **Research Implications**

This research project focused on the transition process for Southern Baptist military chaplains separating from the Armed Services to discover the key factors that guided, supported, and celebrated this return to the civilian ministry environment. The findings will serve as a source of encouragement and pastoral care as they return to ministry in the local church, denominational or institutional ministry, the Christian academic environment, or ministry in a faith-based nonprofit organization. The findings will also reveal the critical role that the local church and denominational leadership play in assisting a military chaplain's transition back to civilian ministry. Additionally, the findings will hopefully raise the educational awareness in Christian colleges and seminaries concerning the importance of developing curriculum to address the issue of transition in the ministry vocation.

#### **Finding #1 – The Impact of the Calling To Ministry On Transition.**

(Sean) *"I sensed a calling to the ministry during my junior year of high school. I've shared this story constantly with people over the years-- my pastor, my spouse and family, churches, college and seminary professors, my ordination council, and my denominational endorser. I've talked about my calling to the ministry countless times in the military as well - to commanders, soldiers, chaplains, and military chapel congregations. To be honest, I've seldom been asked to share my calling to the ministry since leaving the military chaplaincy."*

The first hypothesis considered the effect of a clear calling to the ministry on the transition process for military chaplains separating from the Armed Services. The former Southern Baptist military chaplains in this study were given a survey (see Appendix D), which included three questions regarding their sense of calling to the ministry. The purpose of these questions was to evaluate the potential effect ministry outside the realm of the local church had on the military

chaplain's call to the ministry. Approximately eighty-seven percent of the military chaplains agreed that they had a strong sense of a calling to the ministry prior to entering the Armed Services. During their tenure in the military, eighty-nine percent of the chaplains stated that they maintained a strong sense of their calling to the ministry.

Since transitioning from the Armed Services, only seventy-one percent of the former military chaplains said that they maintained a strong sense of calling to the ministry. Putting this into perspective, sixteen percent (240) of the Southern Baptist Convention's 1500 formerly endorsed military chaplains no longer felt a strong sense of a calling to ministry after leaving the Armed Forces, some of whom stated that they were considering other professional vocations outside of the ministry.

In that regard, a recent study by The Barna Group found that "two out of five pastors nationwide are seriously thinking about leaving the ministry."<sup>29</sup> The study goes on to report, "One of the most alarming findings is that pastors in the ministry for 20 years or more were seriously thinking about quitting the ministry, ... (and) forty-six percent of pastors under the age of 45 say they are considering quitting full-time ministry."<sup>30</sup> The Barna study concluded that the recent increased exodus of pastors is largely due to the increasing demands of the ministry, an overwhelming sense of loneliness due to "virtual church", and serious financial constraints from the coronavirus pandemic which closed churches. Life circumstances have a way of clouding or weakening one's sense of calling to the ministry. According to a recent Lifeway Research study, "close to one percent of evangelical and historically Black Protestant senior pastors step away from

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<sup>29</sup> The Barna Group, "38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year," *Barna Research: Leaders and Pastors*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>.

<sup>30</sup> Barna, "38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting."

the pulpit each year.”<sup>31</sup> These reasons include a change in one’s ministry calling, church conflict, family issues, moral or ethical failure, personal finances, and burnout.

Military chaplains face their own unique circumstances that cause them to question their continued calling to the ministry. First, they face the constant pressure of balancing their role as a religious leader and a commissioned officer. Second, military chaplains often struggle with the facilitation of religion for all those under their pastoral leadership while, at the same, remaining true and uncompromising to their personal faith, beliefs, and practices. Third, they occasionally find themselves under the supervision of a career-focused or toxic chaplain supervisor who can often cause them to question the legitimacy of the military chaplaincy. One chaplain told me, “When I first entered the chaplaincy, I was warned that chaplains are the only people in the military who ‘eat their young,’ having absolutely no regard or respect for their fellow chaplains, or anyone for that matter who might get in the way of their next promotion.”

Regardless of these challenges, this study found that most of the chaplains surveyed maintained a strong sense of calling to the ministry before and during their tenure as military chaplains. A clear sense of calling to the ministry and the military chaplaincy drives the denominational endorsement process for those who feel a calling to the military chaplaincy. At the local church and denominational level, a military chaplain applicant’s calling is validated by their pastor, members of their current congregation, and their previous professional ministry experience. The Armed Forces Chaplain Recruiters often require chaplain applicants to complete an essay entitled, “Why I want to be a Military Chaplain.” During the recruiting process, applicants are required to meet with a senior military chaplain who evaluates their calling to the ministry and potential for the military chaplaincy. The evaluation criteria includes the assessment of such things

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<sup>31</sup> Aaron Earls, “Few Pastors Left the Pulpit Despite Increased Pressure,” Lifeway Research: Church Life and Ministry, October 25, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/10/25/few-pastors-left-the-pulpit-despite-increased-pressure/>.

as the applicant's professional and academic qualifications, pastoral abilities, motivation for the military chaplaincy, and willingness to work cooperatively and respectfully with chaplains of other faith groups. Once endorsed by their denomination and commissioned into the Armed Services, military chaplains are constantly reminded by their respective chaplain supervisors, the military chaplaincy senior leadership, and their denominational endorsers on the importance of maintaining their pastoral identity and their sense of calling to the ministry throughout their military ministry.

However, this study discovered that military chaplains often lack the opportunity to express or fail to re-envision their sense of calling to the ministry after separating from the Armed Services and returning to the civilian ministry setting. A military chaplain's transition process and return to civilian life should be a time of reflection, self-examination, and celebration of their season of military ministry. The chaplain's journey "home" to the church that sent them out for ministry to the members of the Armed Services years ago should also be shared and celebrated with that congregation and the denominational family. One author writes,

When God calls, it is a very big deal. It is holy ground. It produces within us such reverence and awe. Finally, the whole of our life begins to make sense, and new awareness of the divine orchestration that has brought us to this moment makes us want to take off our shoes or fall on our face. We 'see' with new eyes that God's call on our life is so tightly woven into the fabric of our being, so core to who we are, that to ignore it or to refuse it would be to jeopardize or well-being. If we were to try to compromise or live it only halfway, we'd run the risk of plunging into emptiness and meaninglessness.<sup>32</sup>

### **Application: Re-envision Your Calling to the Ministry.**

As a result of this study, the researcher recommends several actions that can be taken by the Armed Services, denominational endorsers, churches, and military chaplains to continue to "fan into flame" the gift of God's calling onto the life of military chaplains:

1. *Denominational Endorser.*

- a. Require applicants for the military chaplaincy to submit a spiritual pilgrimage of their calling to the ministry and the military chaplaincy.
- b. Remain in contact with endorsed chaplains on a regular basis.

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008), 74.

- c. Assign retired military chaplains to chaplains serving in the Armed Forces
- d. Require military chaplains to attend one denominational training event annually.
- e. Schedule periodic performance reviews and ministry updates with military chaplains
- f. Look for opportunities for military chaplains to share their spiritual journey with local churches, denominational entities, and media.

## 2. Military chaplains in transition.

- a. Share your calling to the ministry regularly with your commander, supervisory chaplain, denominational endorser, and local churches.
- b. Update your resume and develop a post-military ministry plan.
- c. Plan a sabbatical to reflect on your ministry calling and spiritual pilgrimage.
- d. Visit a college or seminary and share your calling to ministry with students.
- e. Write down all the Scripture verses, life events, affirmations from other, etc. that confirms your calling to the ministry.

### Finding #2 – The Impact of Prior Civilian Ministry Experience.

(Allen) “*My civilian ministry experience was a very positive one and it definitely prepared me for the military chaplaincy. A retired chaplain told me sarcastically, ‘If you can survive a Baptist business meeting, you’ll have no problem leading a military chapel congregation.’*”

(Chaplain M.) “*I came into the military chaplaincy bruised, bloody, and broken after pastoring a church for twelve years. When I leave the military, I won’t return to the pastorate. I wouldn’t think of doing that to my family. Instead, I plan on providing pastoral care to ministers struggling to survive in the ministry.*”

(David) “*I was always told that pastors who can’t preach or pastor leave the ministry to become chaplains. I strongly disagree with that idea! Becoming a military chaplain was one of the best things that could happen to me. I found the freedom to become the kind of pastor God made me to be. I also discovered more grace in the military ministry than I’ve found in most churches.*”

The second hypothesis examined the impact that previous civilian ministry experience had on military chaplains as they prepared to separate from the Armed Services and return to civilian ministry. The researcher’s initial assumption in this project was that chaplains with more years of civilian ministry experience would naturally return to the familiar environment of a local church ministry setting.

According to the transition survey results administered to the chaplain control group in this study, seventy-one percent of Southern Baptist military chaplains with an average of 0-4 years of

previous civilian ministry experience transitioned back to pastoral leadership positions in local churches after separating from the Armed Services. On the other hand, over sixty percent of those with five or more years of previous civilian ministry experience returned to other ministry opportunities after leaving the Armed Services. Additionally, eleven percent of those surveyed said they were no longer involved in the ministry.

This study led to several conclusions regarding the impact of previous civilian ministry experience on chaplains transitioning from the Armed Services. First, it confirmed the importance of professional ministry experience for individuals seeking to become a military chaplain. The Department of Defense places a high premium on a prospective military chaplain's civilian ministry experience:

To be considered for appointment to serve as a chaplain, a Religious Ministry Professional (RMP) shall receive an endorsement from a qualified Religious Organization verifying the RMP has two years of religious experience (which) shall be compatible with the duties of RMPs in their respective Religious Organization and relevant to the settings of military chaplaincy.<sup>33</sup>

During the Global War On Terrorism (2001-present), the Service Chiefs of Chaplains began to hear concerns that some military chaplains serving in combat zones were not properly trained as religious leaders: (Allen) *"I had a chaplain in Iraq who had never conducted a funeral or memorial service until one of his soldiers was killed in combat. I had to literally walk him through putting together the order of service for his unit."*

As a result, the Service Chiefs of Chaplains asked denominational endorsers to reassess the professional ministry experience required for endorsement as a military chaplain. For example, the North American Mission Board's Chaplain Commission, responsible for endorsing Southern

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<sup>33</sup> Department of Defense Instruction 1304.28, *The Appointment and Selection of Chaplains*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2021, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/130428p.pdf?ver=scWFipz2YzfxGxhj5mdYwg.%3D%3D>.

Baptist chaplains, determined the following ministry skills as the minimum requirements for valid professional ministry experience over a two-year period in a local SBC church setting<sup>34</sup>:

- Leading adults in an SBC church as a pastor ordained to the Gospel ministry
- Responsible for planning and leading a worship service (at least 12 times)
- Crafting and delivering a sermon during a worship service (at least 24 times)
- Experience with providing adult counseling on various topics (e.g., marriage, career, crisis, bereavement, etc.)
- Experience working with a family to plan and conduct a funeral service (at least four times)
- Experience working with a couple seeking marriage by providing premarital counseling and leading the marriage ceremony (at least 1 time)
- Leading a baptism service (at least 2 times)
- Leading and facilitating the ordinance of the Lord's Supper (at least 2 times)

A second conclusion from this hypothesis is that some military chaplains in this study no longer intended to return to ministry solely within a Southern Baptist context. They expressed a desire to be free from denominational rules, directives, and constraints imposed upon them that, in their opinion, hindered ministry. Perhaps this was the result of some military chaplains, having served for years in a pluralistic and ecumenical setting, losing their denominational identity, and wanting to provide pastoral leadership in a more non-denominational environment.

A third conclusion from this hypothesis is that some chaplains expressed they were so severely wounded from their previous civilian ministry experiences that it would be difficult or impossible for them to return to ministry in a local church. Sadly, some civilian pastors come into the military chaplaincy with fresh battle scars. Left untreated, they can seriously hinder a chaplain's

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<sup>34</sup> "SBC Professional Ministry Experience (PME) For Federal Endorsement", email message to Denny Gorena, NAMB Chaplain Commission Chairman, June 8, 2020.

military ministry. Dan Allender in his book, *Leading With A Limp*, writes, “To the degree you face and name and deal with your failures as a leader, to that same extent you will create an environment conducive to growing and retaining productive (ministry) and committed colleagues.”<sup>35</sup>

The researcher concluded that denominational endorsers who thoroughly address a chaplain’s previous civilian ministry experience before their endorsement into the Armed Services and continue to follow up with those who needed additional pastoral care will increase the number of military chaplains returning to a civilian ministry setting. More importantly, it will greatly assist the military chaplain to become more authentic and effective in their ministry:

Nobody escapes being wounded. We are all wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not ‘How can we hide our wounds?’ so we don’t have to be embarrassed, but ‘How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?’ When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.<sup>36</sup>

### **Application: Reassess Your Ministry Giftings.**

As a result of this study, the researcher recommends several actions that can be taken by the Armed Services, denominational endorsers, churches, and military chaplains to prepare for reengagement with ministry in the local church or civilian ministry setting:

#### **1. Denominational Endorser.**

- a. Closely examine a chaplain/applicant’s professional ministry experience.
- b. Lead a discussion with the chaplain/applicant regarding their relationship with their current and previous congregation. Identify any significant successes/failures.
- c. Ask the chaplain/applicant to provide you a theology of the church.
- d. Offer pastoral care assistance to chaplain/applicants who had a painful experience in their previous military assignments or church positions.
- e. Provide the chaplain/applicant with a mentor/coach as requested.

#### **2. Military chaplains in transition.**

- a. Re-examine your previous professional ministry experiences.
- b. Develop a list of your ministry education, competencies, experiences attained while in the military chaplaincy.

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<sup>35</sup> Dan B. Allender, *Leading With A Limp* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Bread For the Journey* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 223.

- c. Re-connect with your previous congregations with an update on your ministry transition back to civilian life.
- d. Schedule an exit interview with your chain of command and supervisory chaplain.
- e. If required, contact a ministry that provides pastoral care (e.g., denominational endorser, Baptist State Convention, Focus on the Family, etc.)

#### Finding #3- The Impact of Networking On Transition.

(Allen) *“My denominational endorser was my lifeline to ministry opportunities beyond the military chaplaincy. We remained in close contact throughout my military service, especially the last few years leading up to my transition process.”*

(John) *“I stayed in regular contact with my sending church and local community my entire time in the military chaplaincy. When I announced my retirement plans, they told me about a pastoral opening in my hometown. I still serve there today.”*

The third hypothesis examined the impact of a strong networking relationship for military chaplains during their transition process from the Armed Services and return to a civilian ministry context. During this project, a transition survey was administered to Southern Baptist military chaplains who separated from the Armed Services between the years 2010 and 2020. The researcher’s assumption was that four key relationships were essential for a successful transition: the military chaplain, the sending church, the ecclesiastical endorser, and other denominational entities. “Networking doesn’t mean asking everyone you run into if they know where the (ministry) openings are. It means establishing relationships so that you can enlist support and comfortably ask for ideas advice, and referrals”<sup>37</sup> to those with influence, connectivity, and prayer support.

According to the transition survey, ninety-two percent of the chaplains said that they had maintained a strong relationship with their sending church, their ecclesiastical endorser, and other denominational entities. However, only forty-four percent experienced little or no guidance and assistance from their sending church during their separation from the Armed Services. That said, most of the chaplains surveyed did not return to their geographical home of record or the community of their sending church. Additionally, approximately forty-eight percent of those

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<sup>37</sup> Anthony and Boersma, 176.

surveyed experienced little or no support from their denominational endorser or other entities during their transition process. Finally, fifty-four percent of those surveyed said they had developed a strong support network of pastors, chaplains, mentors, peers, and friends who advised and prayed for them during their transition process from the Armed Services. On the other hand, twenty percent neither agreed nor disagreed regarding the importance of networking while twenty-six percent of the chaplains felt they had not spent much time developing a supportive network beyond their military ministry.

The researcher reached several conclusions with this hypothesis. First, military chaplains struggle with a problem common to many pastors and leaders: isolation and loneliness:

(John) “*Chaplain B. called me in the middle of the night. I hadn’t heard from or worked with him in over ten years. He was assigned at a large military base in the Bible belt with almost 100 other military chaplains around him. He said he was desperate, “Please help me. I’m in trouble and am really thinking about harming myself. I have no one else to turn to.”*”

Military chaplain interviews in this project often reflected on the isolation they felt and the difficulties they experienced in their attempts to remain in contact with their sending church and denominational endorser. They said their lack of networking and infrequent communication was due to their frequent military moves every two to three years, routine assignments outside of the United States, remote tours of duty in secure locations, and multiple combat assignments.

On the other hand, some military chaplains placed themselves into “self-imposed prisons of loneliness...filled with friendlessness, game playing, power trips, and the manipulation of others to achieve invulnerability.”<sup>38</sup> This study revealed that military chaplains, as well as pastors, must allow other trusted individuals into their lives to provide a listening ear, wise counsel, pastoral care, and prayerful support. “Once they reveal their struggles and their own suffering, others can enter

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<sup>38</sup> Allender, 123.

and attend to the war that often wages in their hearts.”<sup>39</sup>

The second conclusion reached in this hypothesis involves a sense of ownership on the part this four-pronged networking relationship. The researcher heard numerous comments from military chaplains regarding their disappointment with the support from their sending churches and the denominational endorser. On the other hand, military chaplains often failed to keep their denominational support group updated on their current assignment and contact information. The networking relationship begins when an individual informs his congregation that he senses a calling to the military chaplaincy. Hopefully, as the individual’s sending church learns of this important ministry decision, they commit themselves corporately to provide the encouragement and prayer as they sent out their “mobile missionary” into the Armed Services. However, that’s not always the case:

(Allen) “*When I told my pastor that I sensed a calling to the military chaplaincy, he responded, ‘That’s a terrible decision. I think you’re making a big mistake. If I were writing a biography of your life, I wouldn’t include a chapter on the military chaplaincy! That’s the last time I heard from my pastor for decades.*”

The next critical player in a military chaplain’s network, and perhaps the most important person during their military ministry, is the denominational endorser. This individual serves as the military chaplain’s primary point of contact with the denomination. They manage the professional standards, requirements, training, recruiting, and endorsement of chaplains; dialog with external agencies regarding the role of chaplains; provide denominational advisement to endorsed chaplains on religious issues within an institution (e.g., military, prison, etc.); and educate their respective denomination on the chaplaincy ministry. Endorsers also have the pastoral responsibility on behalf of their denomination to maintain regular contact with the endorsed military chaplains through a variety of means, including social media, emails, phone calls, personal notes, annual chaplain training events, and personal visits to the chaplain’s duty assignment. Unfortunately, this study

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<sup>39</sup> Allender.

found very little formal networking engagement between the endorser and the military chaplain during the transition process.

### **Application: Reconnect With the Civilian Ministry Community.**

As a result of this study, the researcher recommends several networking actions that can be taken by the military chaplain, the ecclesiastical endorser, the sending church, and other denominational entities during the chaplain's transition process:

<b><u>Endorser Actions</u></b>	<b><u>Timeframe</u></b>
○ Develop list of military chaplains transitioning to civilian life within the next 12 months	Annually
○ Distribute Ministry Transition Self-Assessment Survey <sup>40</sup> to military chaplains in transition	12 mo. from transition
○ Conduct Exit Interview <sup>41</sup>	1-3 months out
○ Letter to Chaplain's State Convention or Sending Church <sup>42</sup>	6 months out
○ Send Retirement Plaque and Thank You Letter <sup>43</sup> to Chaplain in transition	1-3 months out
○ Send Thank You Letter to Chaplain's spouse <sup>44</sup>	1-3 months out
○ Attend Chaplain's retirement ceremony	TBD
○ Present A "Chaplain For Life" Pin	TBD
○ Follow-up on the Chaplain with a personal note	1 mo. post-transition
○ Invitation to "Chaplain For Life" Reunion	Every 3-5 years

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<sup>40</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>41</sup> Appendix F.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix G.

<sup>43</sup> Appendix H.

<sup>44</sup> Appendix I.

<u>Chaplain Actions</u>	<u>Timeframe</u>
○ Alert endorser of your intent to leave the military	1-2 years out
○ Discuss exit strategy with the endorser	12 mo. from transition
○ Send out retirement ceremony invitation	1-3 months out
○ Schedule Exit Interview with endorser	3-6 months out

#### Finding #4 – The Impact of An Exit Strategy On Transition.

(David) “*When I left the military chaplaincy, I went into a deep depression for about eight months. I felt out of balance, out of place. I lost my tears, my compassion, my identity.*”

(Allen) “*One of the hardest things for me after leaving the military chaplaincy was finding a church home. It took me over year. I felt so invisible and out of place when I visited most of the churches. I missed the multi-cultural, multi-generational, multi-faith experience of a military Protestant chapel congregation.*”

(Sean) “*I came out of the military chaplaincy with some deep, invisible wounds of war. I really wanted to talk with someone about my PTSD, but I found it so hard to trust anyone with my story or, for that matter, anyone who I thought would take the time to listen... .*”

The fourth hypothesis examined the impact of a well-planned exit strategy on a military chaplain’s successful transition from military service and return to civilian life and ministry. Most of the chaplains surveyed and interviewed for this study voluntarily or involuntarily separated from the Armed Services. Those chaplains involuntarily separated from the Armed Services were the result of several reasons, including non-selection for promotion to the next level, administrative decisions, or medical issues.

The Department of Defense recommends that a service member leaving the military voluntarily should initiate the development of an individual transition plan (exit strategy) twelve to twenty-four months prior to their retirement or separation date. According to the transition survey administered for this project, sixty-five percent of the chaplains began forming their transition plans three to four years from their separation out of the Armed Services. Thirty-five percent of those

surveyed began their transition process one to three years from the end of their military service termination.

Despite the years of advanced transition planning, only forty-five percent of the military chaplains felt extremely prepared for their separation from the Armed Services while forty-two percent were prepared or somewhat prepared to leave military service. Ten percent of the chaplains stated they were not prepared to separate from military service and had no real plans on their future ministry options. These findings may be one of the reasons that only sixty-six percent of the chaplains had updated their ministry profile and resume for their post-military employment. None of those uncertain about their future beyond the military consulted with their denominational endorser.

“Unfortunately, the sobering reality is that the majority of pastors (and chaplains) do not have a plan for the inevitable moment when they leave their current church and ministry.”<sup>45</sup> As one author aptly noted, too many ministers live by the First (and Only) Law of Wing Walking when it comes to retirement or transition planning: “Never let go of what you are holding onto until you are holding onto something else.”<sup>46</sup> Although this law may work most of the time for “wing walkers,” it offers very little help for those in transition which, of course, requires faith and trust in the Lord who “Himself fixed beforehand the exact times and limits of the places where (we) should live.”<sup>47</sup>

The researcher made several conclusions regarding this fourth hypothesis. First, transition is difficult, especially for military chaplains who were initially acknowledged, commissioned, and sent out

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<sup>45</sup> William Vanderbloeman and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020), 30.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence W. Farris, *Ten Commandments For Pastors Leaving A Congregation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 89.

<sup>47</sup> Acts 17:26, Good News Translation.

by the church as their missionary to the Armed Forces. However, the chaplain often returns home to a new congregation who has long forgotten them.

Second, the researcher notes that military chaplains who transition back home, like all veterans, experience a great deal of loss. They have a significant loss of identity as an endorsed military chaplain, a commissioned officer, a religious leader, a pastor, and a former member of the Armed Services. (Allen) *“I have such a hard time answering people who call me ‘Mister’”*.

Military chaplains in transition also experience the loss of community and belonging to a ministry profession so intimate that they often referred to one another as a band of brothers and sisters. They also must accept the loss of significance in their “new normal” as a civilian minister once again. One chaplain who served with numerous Special Forces units remarked, *“I’ve had such an awesome ministry experience but, due to security reasons, it was a ministry without a portfolio of successes and best practices.”* Another chaplain, reflecting on his ministry in the Baghdad ER said, *“After praying over the wounded and dying, I could care less about refereeing typical church wars over the color of the carpet or why we don’t use hymnals anymore!”*

The researcher observed that military chaplains, like foreign missionaries, face the difficulty of “reverse culture shock” when they transition back to their sending church or civilian community. This condition often affects the psychological, emotional, cultural, and religious wellbeing of an individual going through the transition process or reentry back home after having spent time in another culture. Some chaplains remarked how difficult it was for them to relearn the culture of the denomination (David: *“My denomination has gone off and left me!”*) or the typical civilian church which now seemed so foreign to them.

Finally, the researcher noted the frequent comments from military chaplains who said they were struggling with a sense of loss of their humanity after gone through some gruesome combat experience.

(Allen) “*I keep seeing the innocent faces of the thousands of young men and women who deployed into combat and quickly lost their innocence, and a bit of their humanity, as they witnessed up close the chaos, terror, and carnage of war....*”

The church needs to realize that our military chaplains, like all veterans, return from military service with a different worldview, and vastly different life experiences. They return with several variables that must be taken into consideration for ministry purposes by the sending church and denominational entities, including those chaplains suffering a traumatic experience; or, being seriously injured in the line of duty; or serving in a combat zone; or serving with a fellow service member killed or injured.

Despite the difficult challenges that military chaplains frequently face when transitioning from the Armed Services back the civilian ministry and life, the researcher noted their renewed passion for the Gospel, a fresh anointing for proclamation of the Word, and an intense desire to return to ministry in the civilian environment. In fact, the researcher who pleasantly surprised to see that the chaplains surveyed and interviewed were simply looking to find their way back home to the local church.

The researcher observed that those military chaplains who have successfully transitioned from the Armed Services back to their sending church and civilian ministry have one thing in common: an exit strategy. An exit strategy is “a series of well-defined preplanned steps and options to follow”<sup>48</sup> when voluntarily or involuntarily transitioning out of a ministry position into another ministry environment. An effective exit route from the military chaplaincy balances the inner struggle on what to do next as well as what the Lord wants you to be in the future.

Kyle, a forty-five-year-old former military chaplain, left the Armed Services after more than twenty years of military service. As he began his formal transition planning three years out from his official termination date, he asked my advice on his exit strategy. First, he prayerfully outlined his

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<sup>48</sup> Anthony and Boersma, 100.

ministry giftings, prioritized them, and found Scripture for each potential ministry direction. Then, he meticulously projected his ministry transition plan over a five-year period (see Appendix H). As a result, he was able to almost connect immediately with his primary desire of pastoring a large church with several military veterans and their families.

### **Application: Reorient On Ministry Beyond the Military.**

As a result of this study, the researcher recommends that military chaplains, in conjunction with their denominational endorser, sending church, supervisory chaplains, and mentors, develop an exit strategy that includes the following planning factors:

- Begin individual transition planning one-three years from separation date
- Assess your future ministry options and develop a timeline
- Revise your professional ministry profile (vision statement, philosophy of ministry, resume)
- Update and build networking support
- List professional ministry achievements, education, certifications, etc.
- Identify core competencies and value-added ministries to support local church and civilian ministry setting
- Build continuity file for your successor
- Discuss your transition plan with your spouse and family
- Plan a departure ceremony for your family, friends, military members, etc.
- Send thank you letters to your ministry supporters (sending church, endorser, mentors, family) members, etc.)
- Plan a sabbatical within 3-6 months of transitioning from military service
- Take time to grieve

## Conclusion

This thesis-project has revealed the importance of four critical factors that will lead to military chaplains having a successful transition out of the Armed Services and back into local church and civilian ministry. These include maintaining a strong sense of calling to ministry; holding onto positive ministry experiences and allowing the Lord to heal your wounds incurred along the way; building and maintain an active network of faithful supporters to your chaplaincy ministry; and. developing an intentional exit strategy during the transition planning process. Hopefully, Southern Baptist pastors, churches, and denominational entities can familiarize themselves with these transition factors to become more aware of the challenges faced by military chaplains and more supportive of them as they return home to a new ministry field.

Winslow Homer (1836-1910) was a 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape painter and illustrator from Boston. During the American Civil War *Harper's Weekly* contracted him as an artist-reporter to shadow the Union Army to the front lines and depict what he saw there from the chaotic battle scenes to peaceful camp life. One of his most famous art works was “The Veteran in A Field.”

Homer’s painting (see next page) depicts a veteran in a wheat field harvesting grain with an iron scythe. Although partially in uniform, the citizen-soldier’s war is over. He has returned home to slowly resume his profession as a farmer. Perhaps the veteran’s scythe was hand-forged from his battle sword. The wheat field, ripe for harvest, connotes the veteran’s redemptive future as well as his transition back to a familiar place.

The researcher challenges readers to take time and reflect on Homer Winslow’s painting that captures the essence of this thesis-project. When military chaplains separate from the Armed Services, they all too often long to return to the familiar place where they were first sent out into the military ministry- the local church. Their transition back home takes time, some slower than others perhaps due to their military experiences. However, their burning desire is the same as anyone

called to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Military chaplains bring their primary weapon, the Word of God, to join their fellow believers in the harvest of souls...for the Glory of God.!



**The Veteran In A New Field**

**AGAIN THE FIELDS<sup>49</sup>**

By Natasha Trethewey

A Response To Winslow Homer's post-Civil War painting, "The Veteran in the Field"<sup>50</sup>

No more muskets, the bone-drag weariness of marching,  
the trampled grass,  
soaked earth red as the wine of sacrament  
Now, the veteran turns towards a new field,  
bright as domes of the republic.

Here, he has shrugged off the past—his jacket  
And canteen flung down in the corner  
At the center of the painting, he anchors

the trinity, joining earth and sky  
The wheat falls beneath his scythe—  
A language of bounty—the swaths

the scripture on the field's an open page  
Boundless, the wheat stretches beyond  
the frame, as if toward a distant field—

the white canvas where sky and cotton  
meet, where another veteran toils,  
his hands the color of dark soil

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<sup>49</sup> Natasha Trethewey, "Again the Fields," 2006,  
<https://voetica.com/voetica.php?collection=2&poet=893&poem=8695>.

<sup>50</sup> Homer Winslow, "The Veteran in A New Field," 1865, <https://www.winslowhomero.org/the-veteran-in-a-new-field.jsp>.

APPENDIX A  
PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The following page contains the “Ministry Transition Self-Assessment Survey” that was administered in Calendar Year 2018 to approximately 150 endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains during their annual denominational training conferences.

## MINISTRY TRANSITION SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

**Scale of Preparedness:**

1. Not sure      2.      3.      4.      5.

- \_\_\_\_ 1. I started planning for the transition or retirement from my current chaplaincy position about two years prior to my expected departure date.
- \_\_\_\_ 2. I know what I want to do when I leave my current chaplaincy position, and I am preparing myself and my family for the next chapter in our lives.
- \_\_\_\_ 3. I have done research and understand my options for ministry after leaving my current position.
- \_\_\_\_ 4. I have developed a comprehensive list of all my previous chaplaincy positions, achievements, publications, volunteer work, and community service ministry.
- \_\_\_\_ 5. I have the professional certifications and experience that make me competitive for the type of ministry I plan to pursue in the future.
- \_\_\_\_ 6. My family agrees on the optimum time for a transition from my current chaplaincy position.
- \_\_\_\_ 7. I am building a comprehensive network of individuals that includes pastors, chaplains, denominational leaders, peers, etc. who will assist me during my ministry transition.
- \_\_\_\_ 8. I have maintained an active relationship with my Sending Church or local SBC church pastor.
- \_\_\_\_ 9. I have a generic two-page resume' outlining my professional ministry accomplishments that I will tailor for each ministry position for which I am seeking employment.
- \_\_\_\_ 10. I fully appreciate the cultural differences between my current institutional setting and the next ministry assignment I am considering for employment.
- \_\_\_\_ 11. I understand my strengths and weaknesses and how others see me, as well as the activities that lead me to frustration.

- 12. I have a godly pastor or spiritual mentor advising me as I prepare for a ministry transition.**
- 13. I have a strong network of people praying for me and my family as we prepare for the transition from my current chaplain position.**
- 14. I have good conversation skills that will help me during my interview process.**
- 15. I know what I want to do next and have a plan of action that will allow me to achieve my ministry objectives.**

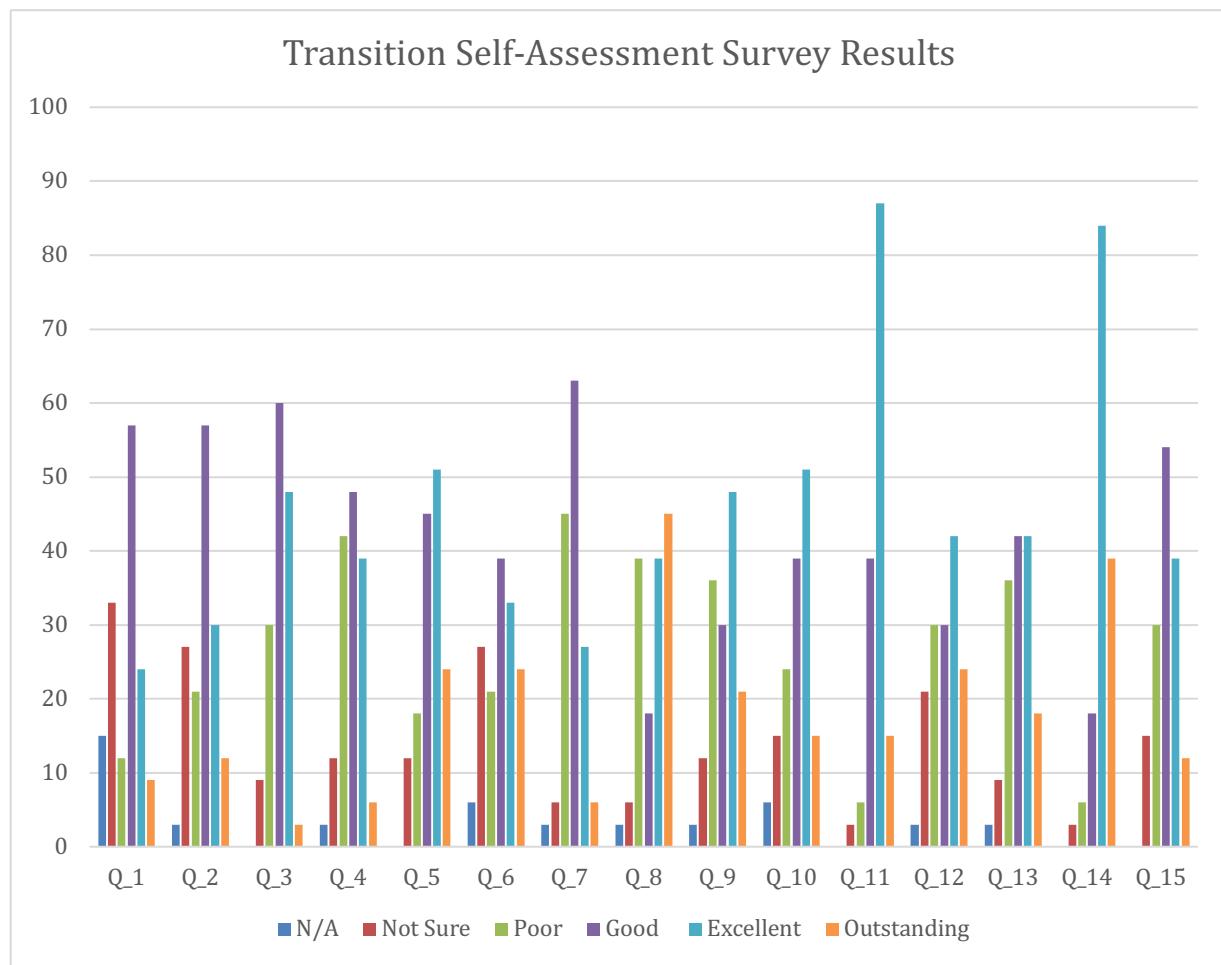
**NOTE:** Please provide your name and contact information if you would be willing to participate in a further discussion on “Transition Ministry Planning For SBC Chaplains”. Thank you.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### TRANSITION SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESULTS

The following appendix contains the “Transition Self-Assessment Survey Results” from a pre-assessment survey that was administered in Calendar Year 2018 to approximately 150 endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains during their annual denominational training conferences.



	<b>Q 1</b>	<b>Q 2</b>	<b>Q 3</b>	<b>Q 4</b>	<b>Q 5</b>	<b>Q 6</b>	<b>Q 7</b>	<b>Q 8</b>	<b>Q 9</b>	<b>Q 10</b>	<b>Q 11</b>	<b>Q 12</b>	<b>Q 13</b>	<b>Q 14</b>	<b>Q 15</b>
N/A	15	3	0	3	0	6	3	3	3	6	0	3	3	0	0
Not Sure	33	27	9	12	12	27	6	6	12	15	3	21	9	3	15
Poor	12	21	30	42	18	21	45	39	36	24	6	30	36	6	30
Good	57	57	60	48	45	39	63	18	30	39	39	30	42	18	54
Excellent	24	30	48	39	51	33	27	39	48	51	87	42	42	84	39
Outstanding	9	12	3	6	24	24	6	45	21	15	15	24	18	39	12

APPENDIX C  
CHAPLAINS IN TRANSITION PRESENTATION

The following appendix contains the “Chaplains In Transition” presentation that was briefed to approximately 150 endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains in 2018-2019 during their annual denominational training conferences.

## CHAPLAINS IN TRANSITION PRESENTATION

**Transition in Ministry**

2018 Southern Baptist Chaplain Annual Training

SBC Chaplaincy



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**TYPES OF MINISTRY TRANSITION**

- Termination
- Forced termination
- Pressured termination
- Health problems
- Death
- Resignation
- Retirement
- Transition to a new ministry

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**TERMINATION ISSUES**

- 23% of all pastors are fired or forced to retire (Article in *Christianity Today*, 1996)
- 1600 pastors are pressured out of the ministry every month → 19,000 annually
- 1500 pastors leave the ministry monthly due to moral failure
- 225 SBC pastors are fired monthly
- 250 SBC pastors resign monthly

\*2010 D.Min. Thesis by Donald Q. Hicks on the termination of SBC Pastors, 2010

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## TOP TEN CAUSES OF TERMINATION

1. Control issues: Who's going to run the church?
2. Poor people skills on the part of the pastor
3. Church's resistance to change
4. Church was already conflicted when the pastor arrived
5. Pastor's leadership style too strong
6. Pastor's leadership style too weak
7. Decline in attendance
8. Pastor's administration incompetence
9. Sexual misconduct
10. Disagreement over doctrine

\*2007 SBC Survey

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## THE RETIREMENT OPTION?

- When your ministry is a paycheck, not a calling
- When you view your people as "the enemy" rather than a community God has called you to shepherd
- When you enjoy picking fights with your supervisor, staff, and fellow chaplains
- When you see ministry as a place to get vs. give
- When you no longer look forward to going to work
- When your ministry is a drain vs. a delight

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## THE WORD "RETIRE"

- First used in 1533 (French: *re'tire'*)
- Definitions:
- To withdraw; to retreat; to go away from a public place into privacy
  - To retreat from combat action or mortal danger
  - To withdraw from a public station
  - To break up, as a company or assembly
  - To depart or withdraw for safety or for pleasure

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## RETIREMENT LANGUAGE

Go  
Hide  
Pass  
Leave  
Recede  
Withdraw  
Step aside  
Out to pasture  
Turn in your badge  
Hang up your spurs  
Give up your office space  
Try on your Walmart greeter vest



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## RETIREMENT, OR REDIRECTION ?

**"The word 'retirement' is not even in the Bible so it's not a biblical concept. What is taught in the scripture is a transition. A ministry assignment may change, but one's calling is for life."**

-- Article, "Pastor Rick Warren Prepares For A Purpose Drive Retirement", March 21, 2013



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**"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim. 4:6-7, ESV)**

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**"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." 1 Pet. 4:10, ESV**

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**"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." (Jn. 13:1, ESV)**



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## KEY TRANSITION QUESTIONS

- So what do I do now?
- Who am I?
- What is God's will for me?
- Is my pastoral calling over?
- Has God really called me to the ministry?

|» "For the gifts and the calling of God are firm."  
SBC Chaplaincy

--Romans 11:29 (ESV)

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## WHY PASTORS (AND CHAPLAINS) DOUBT THEIR CALL

- People treat me differently as a pastor or chaplain
- My spouse resents the amount of time ministry takes
- I have difficulty finding time for recreation/self-care
- Criticism is causing me lots of stress
- My spouse resents the financial insecurity
- I feel so lonely and isolated

|» • The ministry is having a negative effect on my family  
SBC Chaplaincy

--Duke Divinity School study, 2007

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## A THEOLOGY OF THE CALL

- God does the calling (Noah in Gen. 6:13-14)
- God's method of calling is unpredictable (Ex. 3)
- God's call is compelling (Gideon, Judg. 6:11-40)
- The called serve out of a grateful heart (Isa. 6:5)
- God's will may not be linked to your emotions
- God's calling is for life (Rom. 11:29)

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SBC Chaplaincy

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### DISCERNING THE CALL

- A stirring of the heart
- Bible verse/s
- Confirmation of church leaders
- Prayer
- A sign, symbol, dream
- Guidance of a mentor

» • Full support of your spouse

SBC Chaplaincy

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### TRANSITION IN MINISTRY BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

- Isaac and Joseph (Gen. 49: 22-26)
- Moses and Joshua (Josh. 1:1-9)
- Saul and David (1 Sam. 16: 1, 12-13)
- Jesus and Peter (Luk. 22:31)
- Twelve Disciples (Acts 1:8)
- Paul (Acts 13:47)

» • The Great Commission and us? (Mat. 28:18-20)

SBC Chaplaincy

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### CHAPLAIN MINISTRY TRANSITION- THE CHALLENGES

- Cultural readjustment
- Psychological distress (culture shock)
- Grief and loss
- Reestablishing family life and community
- Absence of clear ministry for the future

» • Lack of the church's interest in faith journey

SBC Chaplaincy

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### TRANSITION IN MINISTRY QUESTIONS

1. Where are you restless in your current ministry? Why?
2. Have I given my current ministry a full and honest effort?
3. How has the Holy Spirit been speaking to you about your ministry calling?
4. Are my reasons for considering a change in keeping with godly values?
5. What strengths have I developed that would indicate a change in ministry setting?

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SBC Chaplaincy

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### TRANSITION IN MINISTRY QUESTIONS (cont'd)

6. Am I the right person for the season my chaplaincy ministry is currently in?
7. How well do I fit in with the prevailing organizational culture?
8. What impact would my leaving (or staying) have on this ministry?
9. In what ways would staying in this ministry help or harm my family?
10. Is God giving me a new chapter of ministry—a new adventure of faith? Why?

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SBC Chaplaincy

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### TRANSITION IN MINISTRY THE NEEDS

- Church planters
- Pastors
- Chaplains
- Church staff
- Mentors and coaches
- Counselors

|> ► Educational institutions  
SBC Chaplaincy

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### TRANSITION IN MINISTRY CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ Pray for God's wisdom and discernment
- ▶ Know yourself
- ▶ Consider your options
- ▶ Consult with others, especially your family
- ▶ Develop a ministry plan of action
- ▶ Do your homework
- ▶ Be humble, available, obedient (Is. 6)

|> SBC Chaplaincy

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### QUESTIONS?

|> SBC Chaplaincy

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## APPENDIX D

### SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The following appendix contains the “Transitioning From Military Chaplaincy to the Civilian Ministry” survey that was sent to retired Southern Baptist military chaplains.

### Transitioning From Military Chaplaincy To the Civilian Ministry

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this brief survey on your personal experiences in transitioning from the military chaplaincy back to civilian life. My intent is to use the results to establish a formal transition program for Southern Baptist endorsed military chaplains returning to a civilian ministry setting after leaving the Armed Services.**

**When answering this survey, please check the appropriate box as indicated. Unanswered items reduce the usefulness of this survey. Your participation in this survey is very important.**

**Please note that your survey responses are anonymous. Thank you again for your cooperation. I pray that you find this process helpful in reflecting back on your ministry as a military chaplain, the blessing of your calling to the ministry, and your personal contribution towards advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the souls of the members of the Armed Services and their families. Thanks for your service the Lord and our Nation.**

**If you have any questions about this survey, please contact me at [dlcarver73@gmail.com](mailto:dlcarver73@gmail.com).**

1. How many years ago did you transition out of the military chaplaincy?

- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- Over 10 years

2. How long did you serve as an endorsed military chaplain?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 10 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 26-30 years   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10-19 years        | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 30 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20-25 years        |  |

3. What was your military branch of service? (Check all that apply)

- |                                    |                                   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Air Force    | <input type="radio"/> Navy        |
| <input type="radio"/> Army         | <input type="radio"/> Coast Guard |
| <input type="radio"/> Marine Corps |                                   |

4. How many years of ministry experience did you have prior to becoming a military chaplain?

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> 0-2 years  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> 11-20 years |
| <input type="radio"/> 2-4 years  | <input type="radio"/> Over 20 years          |
| <input type="radio"/> 5-10 years |  |

5. What was your ministry experience prior to becoming endorsed as a military chaplain? (Check all that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Pastor            | <input type="radio"/> Pastoral Staff                                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Executive Pastor  | <input type="radio"/> Denominational Leader or Staff                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Minister of Music | <input type="radio"/> Ministry Leadership Role Outside of the Church |

6. I felt a strong sense of God's calling into the ministry of the military chaplaincy.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="radio"/> Disagree          |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree                      | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree |   |

7. My spouse supported my decision to become a military chaplain.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="radio"/> Disagree  |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree                      | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree                                   |
| <input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="radio"/> I was single when I entered the military chaplaincy |

8. My Sending Church and/or pastor supported my calling into the military chaplaincy.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="radio"/> Disagree             |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree                      | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree    |
| <input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="radio"/> Does not apply to me |

9. What ministry role/s have you performed since leaving the military and returning to civilian life? (Check all that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pastor                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Denominational Leader or Staff              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intentional Interim Pastor | <input type="checkbox"/> Lay leadership (teaching, counseling, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Executive Pastor           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minister of Music          | <input type="checkbox"/> Not actively involved in ministry           |

10. I continually sensed God's calling to serve as a military chaplain throughout my military service.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neither agree nor disagree |  |

11. I regularly maintained contact with my denominational endorser throughout my ministry as a military chaplain.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neither agree nor disagree |  |

12. How would you describe your transition experience from the military chaplaincy back to civilian life?

- |                                    |                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good      | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral   |                               |

13. In retrospect, how well did you feel prepared to resume civilian ministry beyond the military chaplaincy?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exceptionally prepared | <input type="checkbox"/> A little prepared   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepared               | <input type="checkbox"/> Unprepared  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat prepared      | <input type="checkbox"/> I had no plans to resume a full-time civilian ministry role |

14. When did you begin planning for your transition from the military chaplaincy back to civilian life?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 6 months | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 years  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 to 12 months     | <input type="checkbox"/> I had no transition plan upon separation from military service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 to 2 years       |   |

15. My denominational endorser assisted me in my transition from the military chaplaincy back into civilian ministry.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Does not apply to me |

16. My local church assisted me during my transition from the military chaplaincy back into the civilian ministry.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neither agree nor disagree |  |

17. I developed a strong network or pastors, chaplains, peers, friends, etc. who advised and prayed for me and my family during my ministry transition from the military chaplaincy.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neither agree nor disagree |  |

18. Having transitioned from the military chaplaincy to civilian life, I still sense a Divine calling in my life as an ordained minister of the Gospel.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neither agree nor disagree |  |

19. How old were you when you answered your calling into the ministry?

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 35-40         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18-24    | <input type="checkbox"/> Older than 40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34    |  |

20. What is your race?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> White or Caucasian        | <input type="radio"/> American Indian or Alaska Native          |
| <input type="radio"/> Black or African American | <input type="radio"/> Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander |
| <input type="radio"/> Hispanic or Latino        | <input type="radio"/> Another race                              |
| <input type="radio"/> Asian or Asian American   |   |

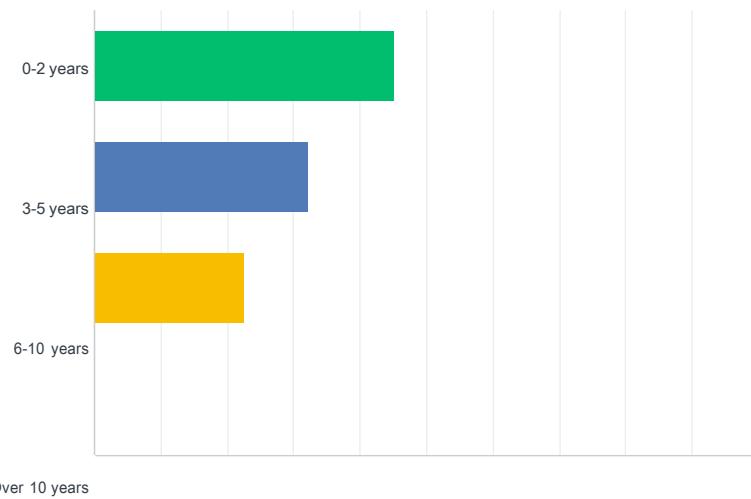
## APPENDIX E

### SURVEY RESULTS

The following appendix contains the survey results from the “Transitioning From Military Chaplaincy to the Civilian Ministry” survey that was sent to 157 retired Southern Baptist military chaplains.

**Q1 How many years ago did you transition out of the military chaplaincy?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



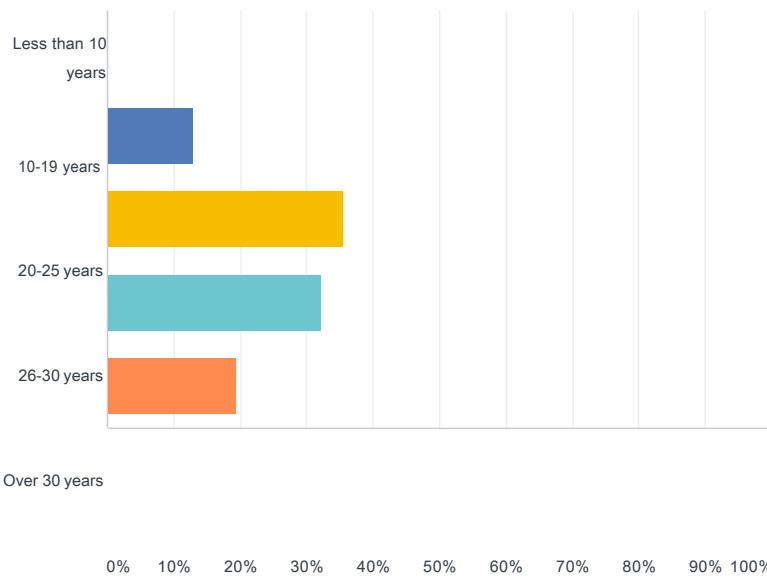
Over 10 years

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-2 years	45.16%	14
3-5 years	32.26%	10
6-10 years	22.58%	7
Over 10 years	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 31		

**Q2 How long did you serve as an endorsed military chaplain?**

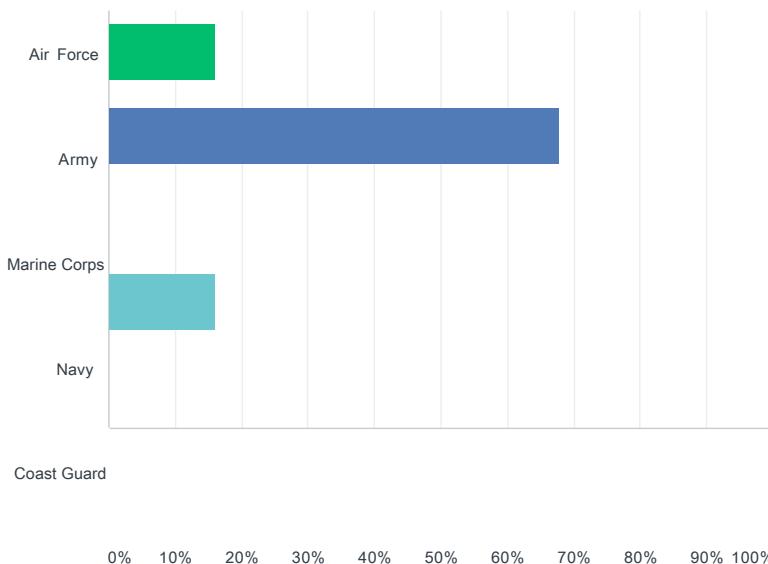
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Less than 10 years	0.00%
10-19 years	12.90%
20-25 years	35.48%
26-30 years	32.26%
Over 30 years	19.35%
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q3 What was your military branch of service? (Check all that apply)**

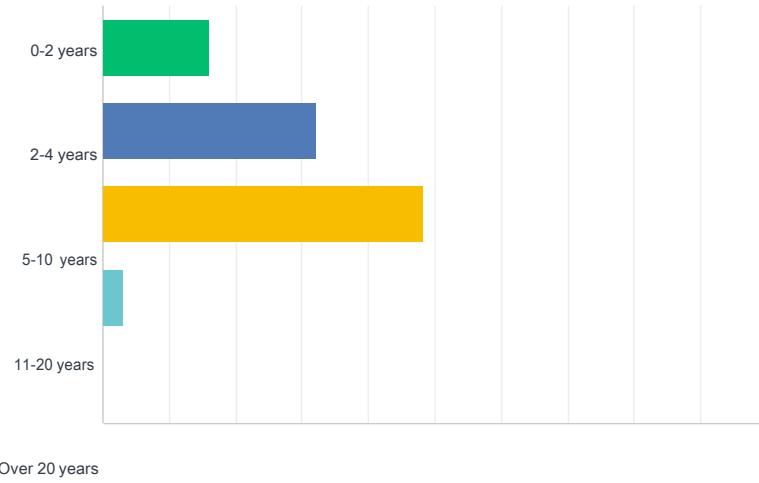
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Air Force	16.13%
Army	67.74%
Marine Corps	0.00%
Navy	16.13%
Coast Guard	0.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>

**Q4 How many years of ministry experience did you have prior to becoming a military chaplain?**

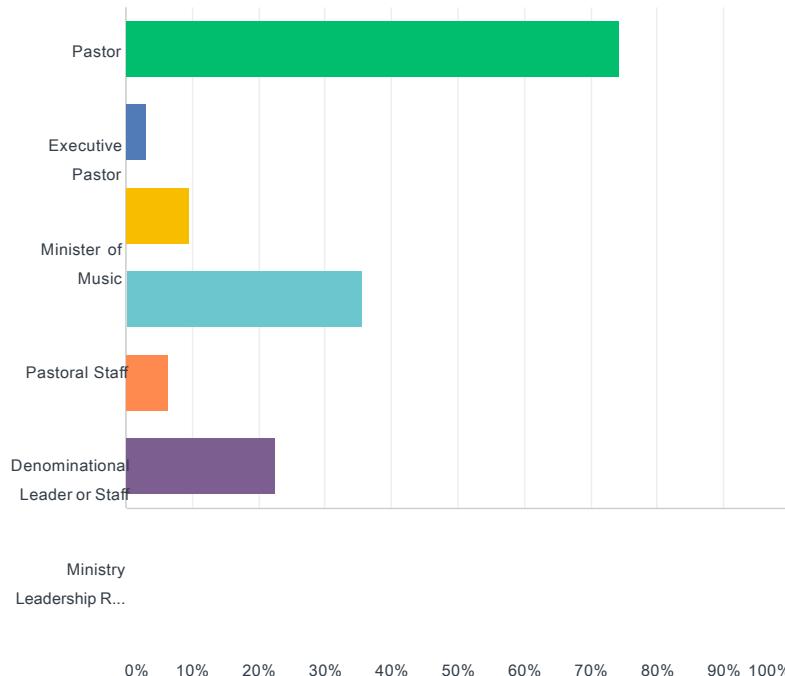
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
0-2 years	16.13%
2-4 years	32.26%
5-10 years	48.39%
11-20 years	3.23%
Over 20 years	0.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>

**Q5 What was your ministry experience prior to becoming endorsed as a military chaplain? (Check all that apply)**

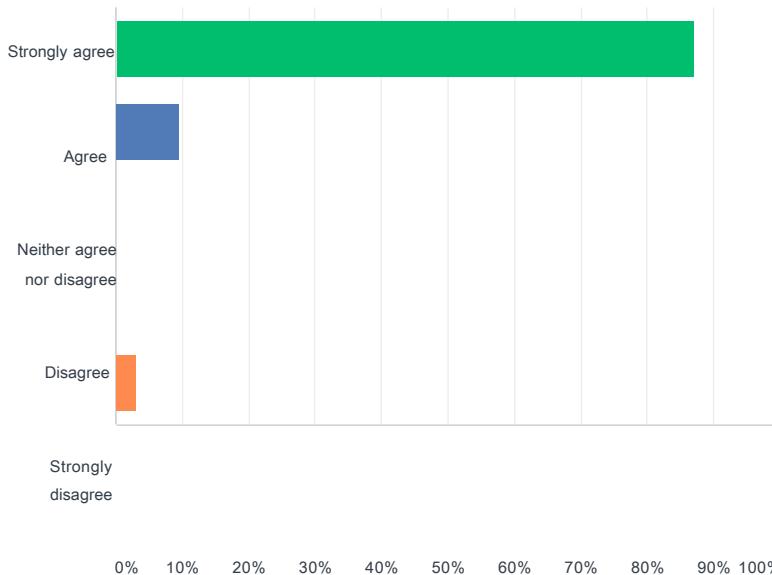
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Pastor	74.19%
Executive Pastor	3.23%
Minister of Music	9.68%
Pastoral Staff	35.48%
Denominational Leader or Staff	6.45%
Ministry Leadership Role Outside of the Church	22.58%
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q6 I felt a strong sense of God's calling into the ministry of the military chaplaincy.**

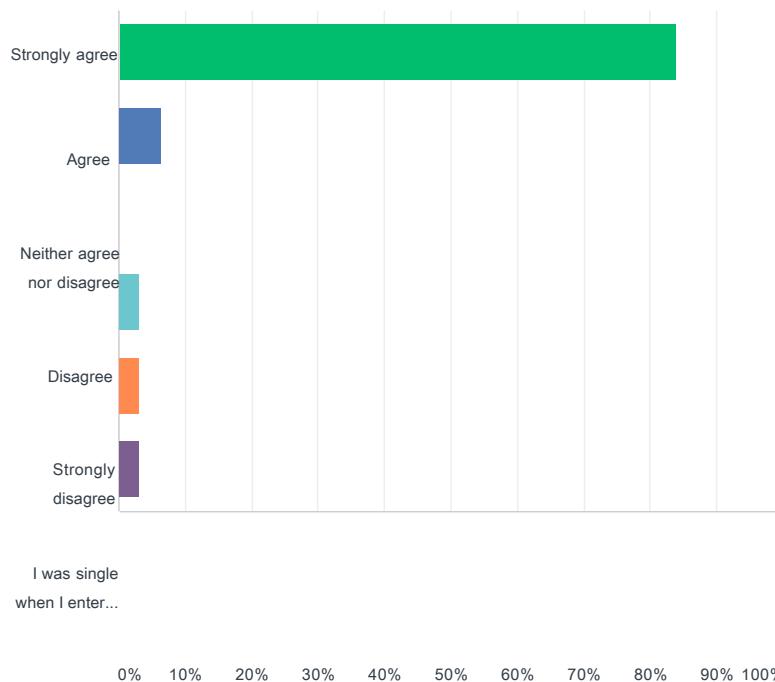
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	87.10%
Agree	9.68%
Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%
Disagree	0.00%
Strongly disagree	3.23%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>

### Q7 My spouse supported my decision to become a military chaplain.

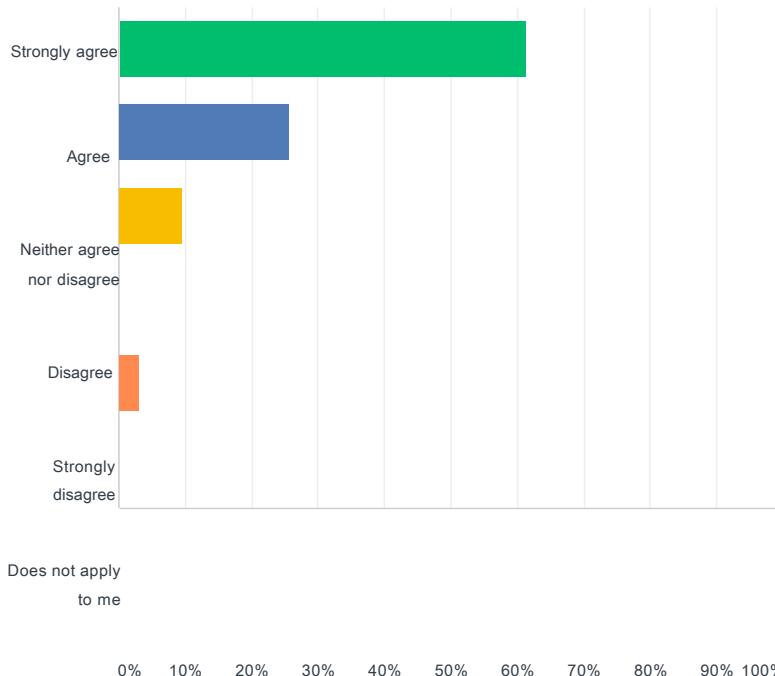
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	83.87%
Agree	6.45%
Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%
Disagree	3.23%
Strongly disagree	3.23%
I was single when I entered the military chaplaincy	3.23%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>

### Q8 My Sending Church and/or pastor supported my calling into the military chaplaincy.

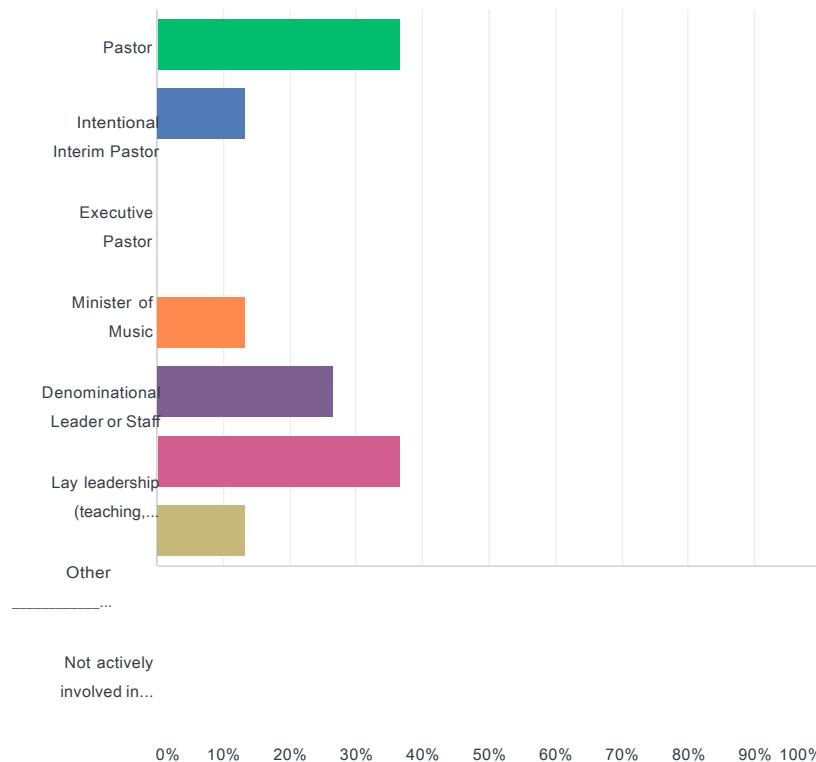
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	61.29%
Agree	25.81%
Neither agree nor disagree	9.68%
Disagree	0.00%
Strongly disagree	3.23%
Does not apply to me	0.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>

**Q9 What ministry role/s have you performed since leaving the military and returning to civilian life? (Check all that apply)**

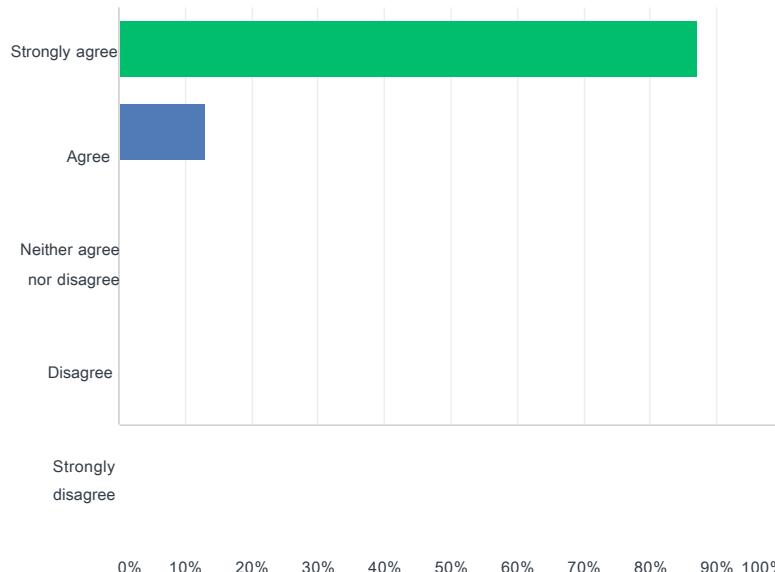
Answered: 30 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Pastor	36.67% 11
Intentional Interim Pastor	13.33% 4
Executive Pastor	0.00% 0
Minister of Music	0.00% 0
Denominational Leader or Staff	13.33% 4
Lay leadership (teaching, counseling, etc.)	26.67% 8
Other _____	36.67% 11
Not actively involved in ministry	13.33% 4
Total Respondents: 30	

**Q10 I continually sensed God's calling to serve as a military chaplain throughout my military service.**

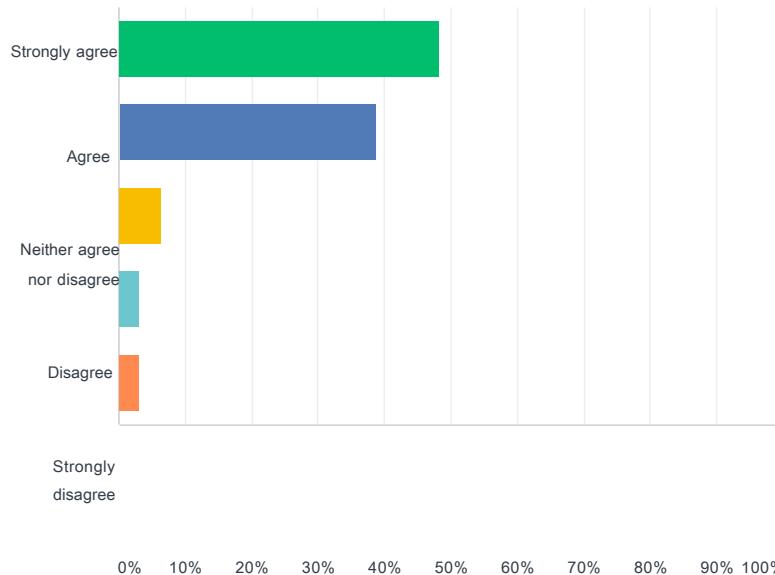
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	87.10%
Agree	12.90%
Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%
Disagree	0.00%
Strongly disagree	0.00%
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q11 I regularly maintained contact with my denominational endorser throughout my ministry as a military chaplain.**

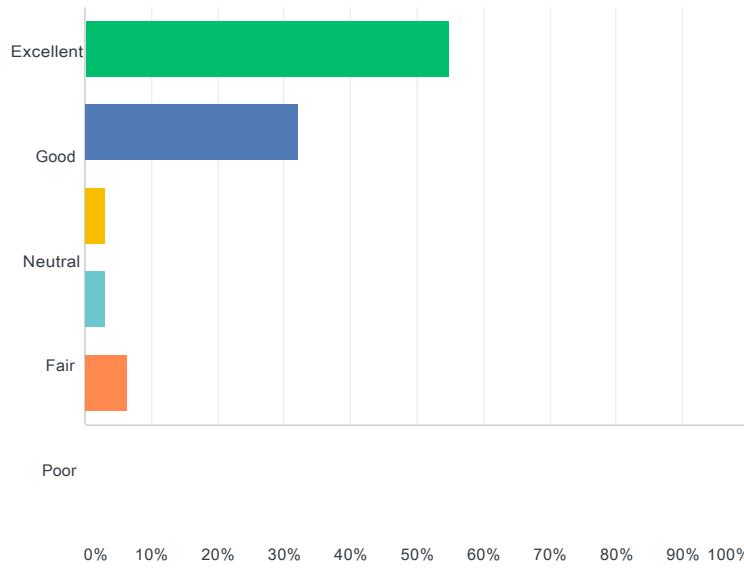
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	48.39%
Agree	38.71%
Neither agree nor disagree	6.45%
Disagree	3.23%
Strongly disagree	3.23%
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q12 How would you describe your transition experience from the military chaplaincy back to civilian life?**

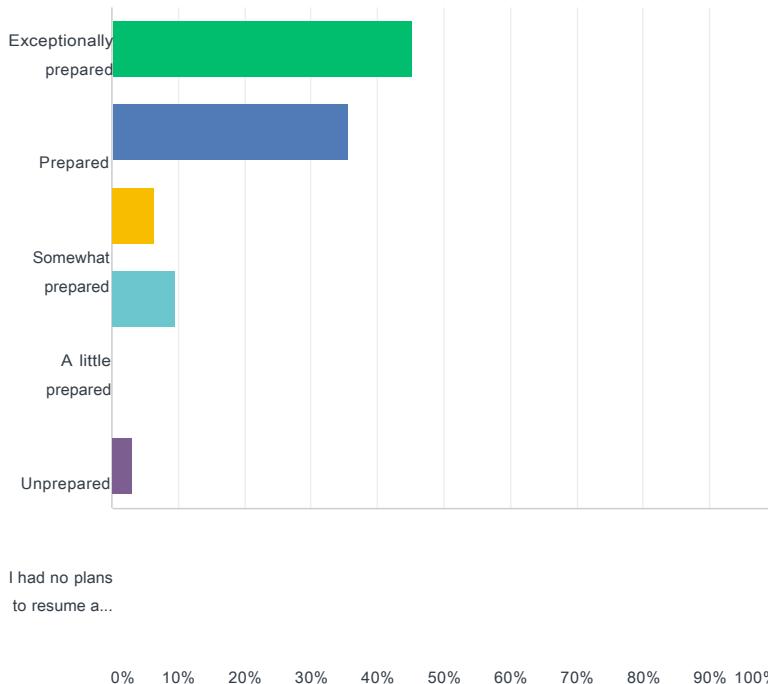
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Excellent	54.84%	17
Good	32.26%	10
Neutral	3.23%	1
Fair	3.23%	1
Poor	6.45%	2
Total Respondents: 31		

**Q13 In retrospect, how well did you feel prepared to resume civilian ministry beyond the military chaplaincy?**

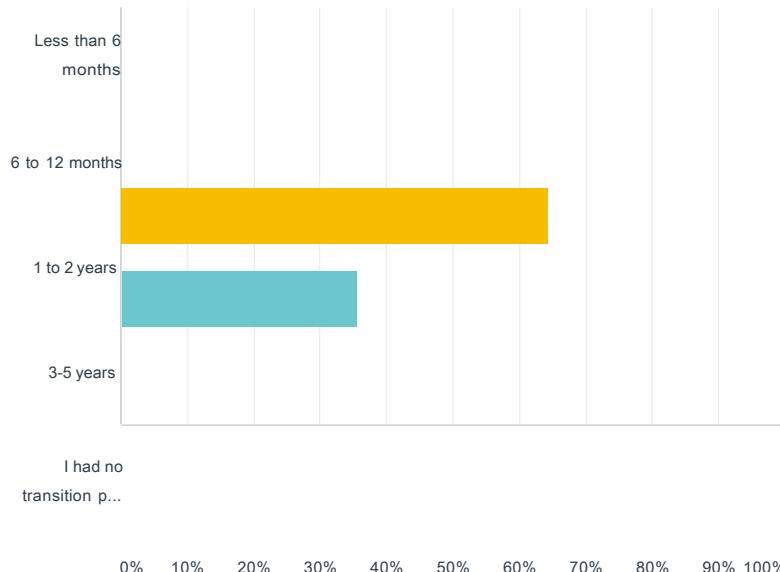
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Exceptionally prepared	45.16% 14
Prepared	35.48% 11
Somewhat prepared	6.45% 2
A little prepared	9.68% 3
Unprepared	0.00% 0
I had no plans to resume a full-time civilian ministry role	3.23% 1
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q14 When did you begin planning for your transition from the military chaplaincy back to civilian life?**

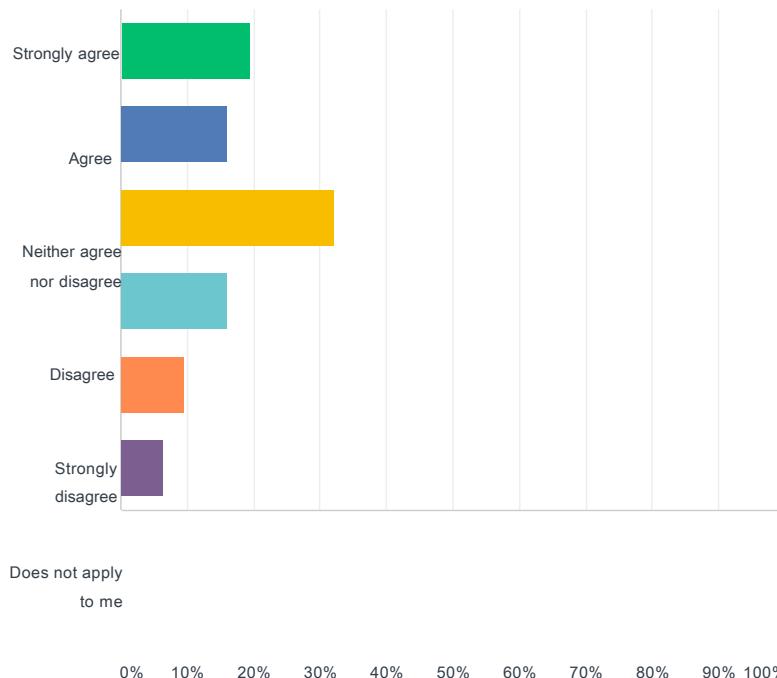
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 6 months	0.00%	0
6 to 12 months	0.00%	0
1 to 2 years	64.52%	20
3-5 years	35.48%	11
I had no transition plan upon separation from military service	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 31		

**Q15 My denominational endorser assisted me in my transition from the military chaplaincy back into civilian ministry.**

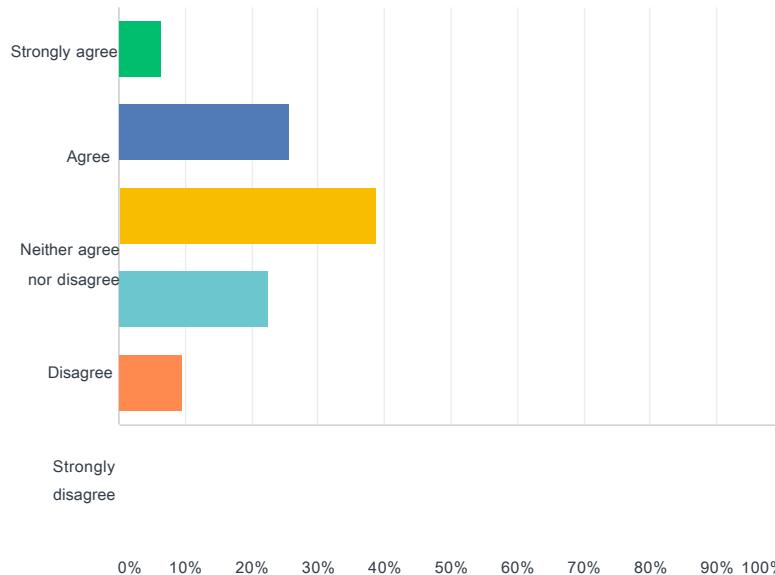
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	19.35%
Agree	16.13%
Neither agree nor disagree	32.26%
Disagree	16.13%
Strongly disagree	9.68%
Does not apply to me	6.45%
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q16 My local church assisted me during my transition from the military chaplaincy back into the civilian ministry.**

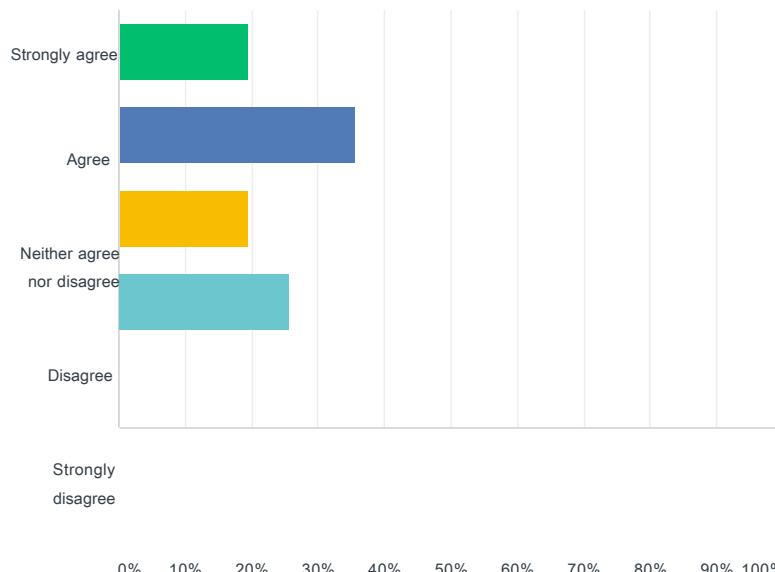
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	6.45%
Agree	25.81%
Neither agree nor disagree	38.71%
Disagree	22.58%
Strongly disagree	9.68%
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q17 I developed a strong network or pastors, chaplains, peers, friends, etc. who advised and prayed for me and my family during my ministry transition from the military chaplaincy.**

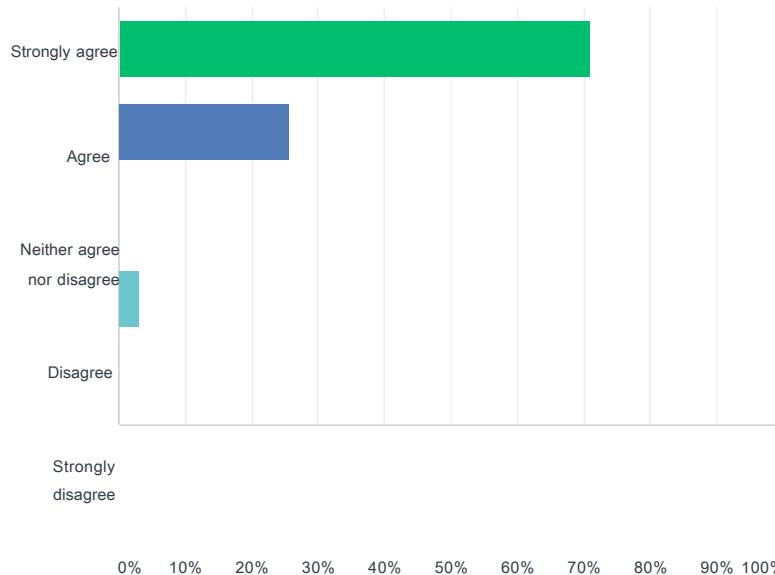
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	19.35%
Agree	35.48%
Neither agree nor disagree	19.35%
Disagree	25.81%
Strongly disagree	0.00%
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q18 Having transitioned from the military chaplaincy to civilian life, I still sense a Divine calling in my life as an ordained minister of the Gospel.**

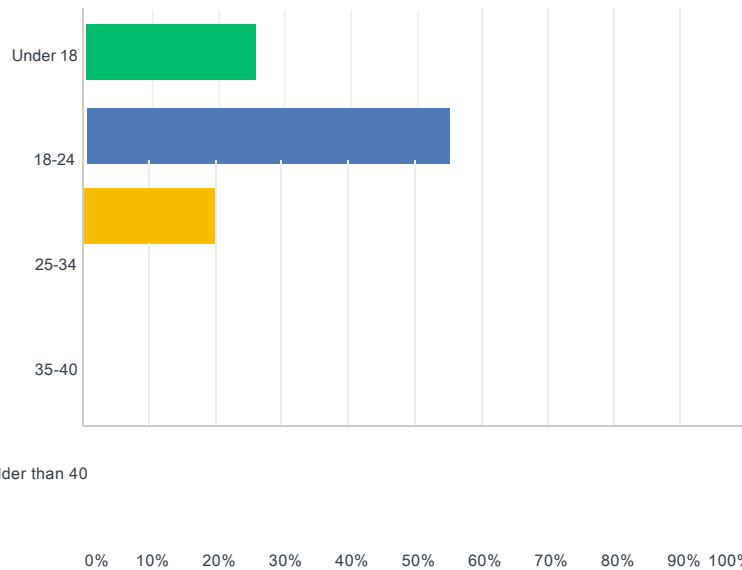
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	70.97%
Agree	25.81%
Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%
Disagree	3.23%
Strongly disagree	0.00%
Total Respondents: 31	

**Q19 How old were you when you answered your calling into the ministry?**

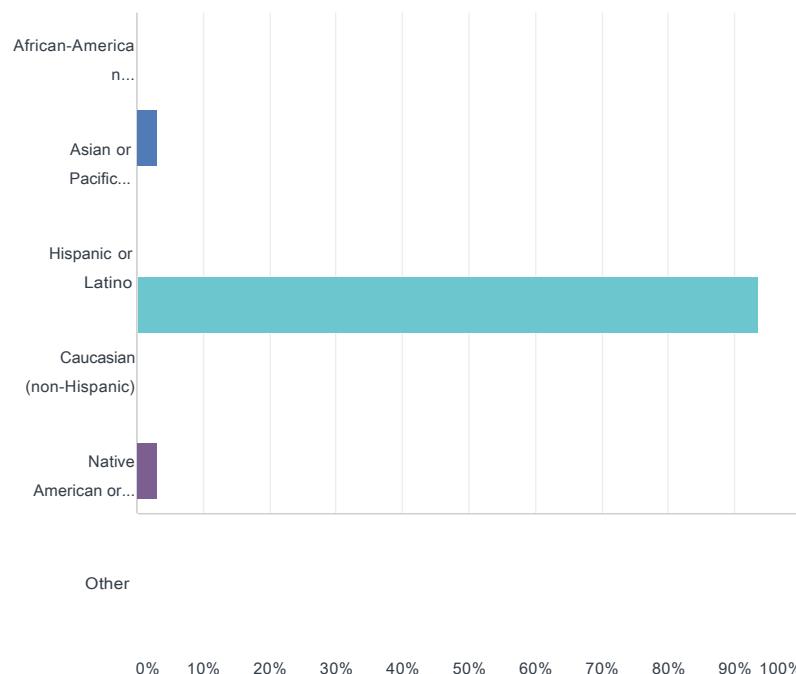
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Under 18	25.81%
18-24	54.84%
25-34	19.35%
35-40	0.00%
Older than 40	0.00%
Total Respondents: 31	

## Q20 Which ethnic or racial group do you most identify?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
African-American (non-Hispanic)	0.00%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.23%
Hispanic or Latino	0.00%
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	93.55%
Native American or Aleutian	0.00%
Other	3.23%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>

**APPENDIX F**  
**CASE STUDY INTERVIEW TEMPLATE**

Interviewee Name:

Branch:

Years of Service:

Date of Retirement:

1. Why did you transition from the military chaplaincy? How well were you prepared for your transition (0-10)?
2. What are some reasons military chaplains experience success or difficulties in their transition back to civilian life?
3. What would you do differently to prepare for your transition from the Armed Services back to the civilian ministry environment?
4. How satisfied is your family/spouse with your transition to the civilian ministry (0-10)?
5. How was your self-identity challenged in a military culture (rank)? How did you avoid losing your pastoral identity?
6. What has been your greatest challenge during your transition back to civilian life?
7. What one piece of advice can give to chaplains transitioning from the Armed Services?
8. How often have you shared your sacred story (publicly or privately) since transitioning back to civilian life? What was your experience in sharing your story?
9. Romans 11:29 says that God's gifts and calling are irrevocable. What does that mean to you now that you have transitioned back to the civilian ministry?
10. How long did it take for you to adjust to civilian life? What helped you?

Thank you!

## APPENDIX G

### LETTER TO STATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear State Executive Director,

I want to let you know about a leadership transition in your State Convention. One of our endorsed Southern Baptist military chaplains, Chaplain Colonel Bill Chappie, is in the process of transitioning out of the U.S. Air Force and will be moving to the Reentryville, GA area in the near future.

Bill has honorably served our Nation and Southern Baptists for the past twenty years. He has held several pastoral leadership positions throughout his time in the service and is known for his strong evangelism programs and gifted preaching skills. In fact, Bill was instrumental in developing and leading the largest Chapel-Next services in the Air Force Chaplaincy. Last year he led over 200 soldiers to Jesus Christ while deployed to Afghanistan. Additionally, he has developed a successful discipleship program, FaithWorks, that has become the gold standard in the Armed Services.

I recently had a conversation with Bill regarding his future ministry beyond military service. He has a desire to return to the civilian pastorate to continue the calling on his life that he answered twenty years ago. Please consider contacting Bill and welcome him and his family to your State. I'm sure you will be blessed to see God's Hand on this great pastor's life. I've attached a copy of his resume for your information. If you have any questions about this chaplain, please feel free to reach out to me or to one of our Chaplaincy Team staff here at the North American Mission Board.

Thanks again for your prayerful consideration in finding a place of pastoral ministry for Chaplain Bill Chappie within your State Convention. I know he will appreciate your prayers during this time of transition. You might also simply consider dropping him a note to thank him for his service to the nation and to Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Grace be with you,

John A. Baptist  
Executive Director of Chaplaincy  
North American Mission Board

APPENDIX H  
CHAPLAIN TRANSITION LETTER OF APPRECIATION

June 8, 2015

Chaplain (COL) William B. Chappie  
1234 Any Street  
City, ST 12345

Dear Bill,

Congratulations on your retirement from the Air Force Chaplaincy. You touched the lives and ministered to thousands of service men and women and their families. While we can only express our gratitude and appreciation, be assured that our Heavenly Father is so pleased and will remember your service and the sacrifice of your family.

As you transition into civilian life, we hope and pray that our Lord provides you with many years of great health and further ministry for Him and His Bride, the Church. We hope also that He will allow you to enjoy some of the fruits of your labor.

If our SBC Chaplaincy Team, can serve or assist you in the future, please give us the opportunity.

Gratefully,

John A. Baptist  
Executive Director of Chaplaincy  
North American Mission Board

APPENDIX I  
LETTER OF APPRECIATION TO CHAPLAIN'S SPOUSE

June 8, 2015

Mrs. Mary Chappie  
1234 Any Street  
City, ST 12345

Dear Dorothy,

Congratulations to you and Robert on your retirement from the Air Force Chaplaincy. You have represented the Lord Jesus Christ and Southern Baptists so faithfully in support of your husband, the airmen, and family members of the United States Air Force for over 20 years. Your tireless effort and devotion to volunteer service, religious support, and leadership in many military communities, at home and abroad, have enhanced the lives and experiences of untold numbers of people.

The North American Mission Board and the Southern Baptist Convention offer our sincere thanks to you for all you have done over so many years of military ministry. Your unfailing trust and faith in God clearly motivated you to an unequalled level of commitment and leadership to your Air Force Family. We offer our sincere gratitude for the many sacrifices you and your family made over the years of military ministry. We pray that the Lord blesses you and Robert with many years of happiness, good health, and blessings as you prepare to transition back into civilian life.

Sincerely in Christ,

John A. Baptist  
Executive Director of Chaplaincy  
North American Mission Board, SBC

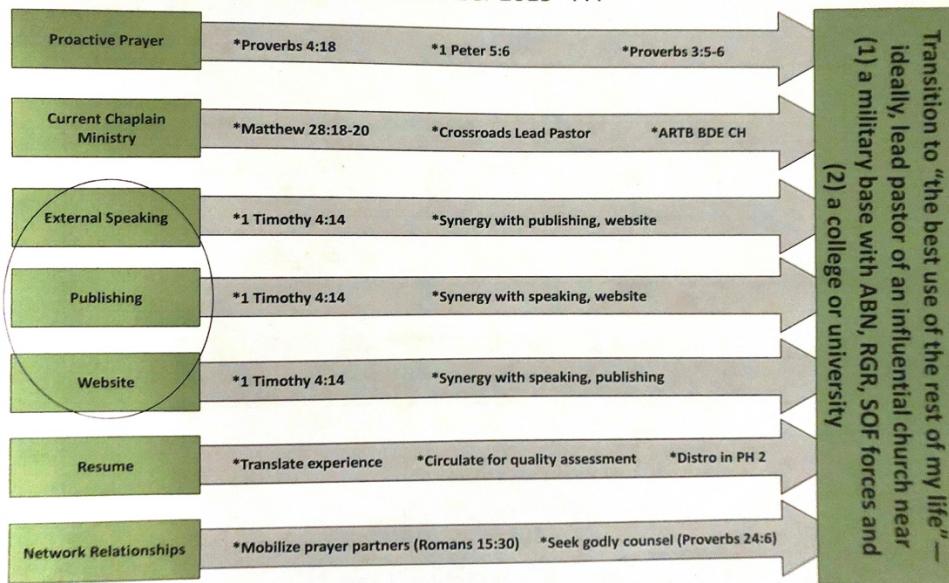
## APPENDIX J

### EXAMPLE OF AN EXIT STRATEGY

The following appendix contains a great example of an Exit Strategy developed by US Army Chaplain (Major) Phil Kramer, US Army, Retired. (Used by permission from the author in an email to me on March 23, 2022).

## Exit Strategy Lines of Effort

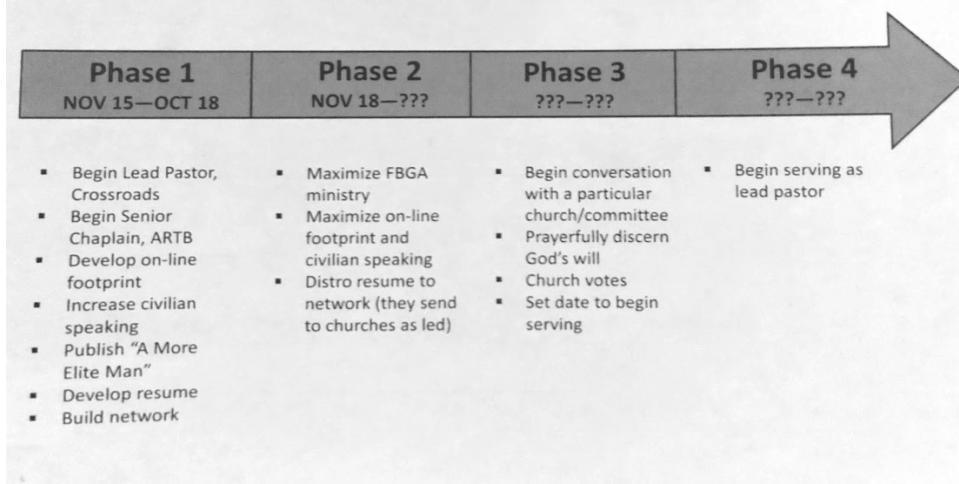
November 2015--???



## Exit Strategy (By Phase)

November 2015--???

ETS 31 JAN 20 (can begin internship as early as AUG 19 or terminal leave early NOV 19)



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## VITA

### **DOUGLAS L. CARVER CHAPLAIN (MAJOR GENERAL), U.S. ARMY, RETIRED**

#### **Personal/Professional**

Married: Susan “Sunny” Alison Carver of Rome, GA, 1973.

Children: Brooke Alison Christmas, Laura Kathleen Gay.

Place of Birth: Rome, Georgia.

#### **Professional**

Retired: Chaplain, Major General, U. S. Army, 1973-2011.

Commission: Reserve Officer Training Corps, University of Tennessee, 1973.

Ordained: Southern Baptist Convention.

#### **Education**

Doctor of Ministry: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2017-2022.

Track: Military Ministry, Date of expected graduation: May 2022.

Master of Strategic Science: U.S. Army War College, 2001.

Master of Divinity: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979-1982.

Bachelor of Arts: University of Tennessee, 1969-1973.

Major: Religious Studies.

Minor: Psychology.

#### **Professional Experience**

Executive Director of Chaplaincy, North American Mission Board, SBC, 2012-present.

Chaplain: U.S. Army, 1981-2011.

Field Artillery Officer: U.S. Army, 1973-1979.

Interim Pastor: Idlewild Baptist Church, Matthews, NC, 2014-2015

Interim Pastor: First Baptist Church, Matthews, NC, 2013-2014

Interim Pastor: South Run Baptist Church, Springfield, VA, 1997.

Senior Pastor: Skyway Baptist Church, Colorado Springs, CO, 1982-1984.

#### **Achievements/Awards**

22nd U.S. Army Chief of Chaplains, 2007-2011.

2016 Accomplished Alumni Award, University of Tennessee.

2016 Army ROTC Hall of Fame Inductee, University of Tennessee.

D.D., Southwest Baptist University, Bolivar, Missouri (2011).

LL.D., Shorter University, Rome, Georgia (2009).

Alumni of the Year, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (2009).

National Bible Association Witherspoon Chaplain’s Award (1995).

Clyde T. Francisco Preaching Award, SBTS (1982).